

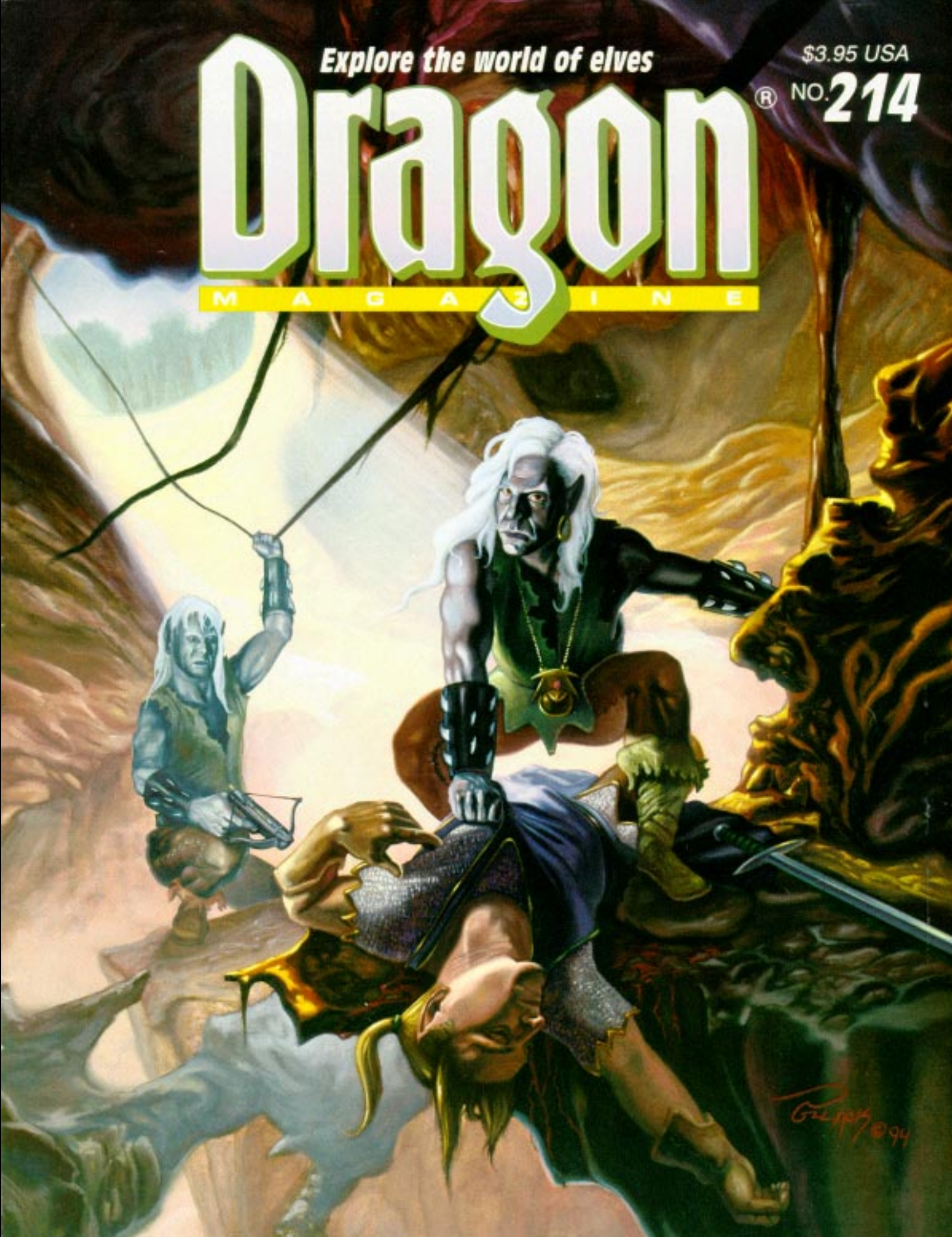
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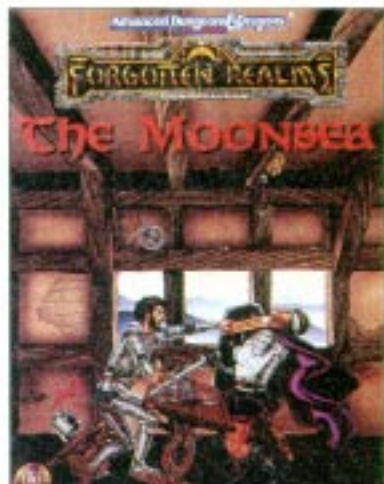
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COVER

Alan Pollack's dramatic cover painting for this issue suggests the valuable spelunker's axiom, "don't go exploring caves alone." This is especially true when those caves may be occupied by the dark elves known as the drow.

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Letters

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. If you wish your letter to be published, you must sign it. We will not publish anonymous letters. We will withhold your name if you request it.

Sorry, Tim

Dear Dragon,

Your reply to Mark J. Beeley (under "Beginners Only?" in "Letters," issue #213) was quite nice, telling Mark about many of the fine products TSR, Inc., has created for high-level characters, but you left out an important one.

The RED STEEL™ campaign setting, released in October 1994, describes the Savage Coast, a war-torn and cursed land. The curse that covers the land gives each person a Legacy, a magical power. These powers come with a price because the curse also twists people, changing them according to their Legacies. An amulet made of *cinnabryl* can protect someone from the worst effects of a curse—but *cinnabryl* only works for a while before its protective powers fail. Depleted *cinnabryl* becomes *red steel*, a magical metal as strong as normal steel but lighter. People fight constantly over *cinnabryl* and *red steel*, the keys to survival and power on the Savage Coast.

Some people, known as Inheritors, gain multiple Legacies. These folks are almost like superheroes—or supervillains. There are new PC races, new kits, new proficiencies, new monsters, and new weapons—including *smoke powder* pistols. It's a fun, challenging campaign.

In other words, it's *great* for high-level characters, or for experienced players with low-level characters.

And it's wonderfully written. (Well, at least my mom thought so.)

Tim Beach
Down the Hall, TSR, Inc.

Mea culpa, *Tim*. The omission was not intentional. I really should've remembered the *Savage Coast* setting, since it previously appeared in these very pages as part of Bruce Heard's "Princess Ark" and *Known World Grimoire* series. Losing my memory at 28. Sigh. —Dale

Ian steps down

Dear Dragon,

Due to recent changes in my life, I will be unable to continue my function as a clearing house for gamers interested in playing by mail. Therefore, I am requesting that one of your most stalwart readers volunteer to take my place. To the first person who responds to this letter by writing to DRAGON Magazine (please don't write to me personally), I will send all player material I have received and compiled so that she may continue where I have left off. As a side note, I was quite pleased and impressed by the sheer number of replies I received to my original letter. I hope all your games work out for you.

Ian Reid
The Dalles OR

Hats off to you, Ian, for a job well done—and for being conscientious enough to let us know when you couldn't continue doing it any longer. Anyone out there who's seriously interested in picking up where Ian is leaving off should drop us a line. For more information on what this is all about, see Shayne Posers' letter in issue #200 and Ian's letter in issue #202.

—Kim

Eriflleps rewsna

Dear Dragon,

I really enjoy the SPELLFIRE™ card game, but something has been bugging me about it for months.

In the Booster Pack set of 25 characters, do the following mean anything backwards?

Card #4, Gib Ekim (Big Mike, perhaps?)

Card #7, Fejyelsae (Jeff Easley?)

Card #11, Gib Evets (Big Steve?)

Card #13, Gib Htimen (Big Nesmith?)

Please tell me if this has any significance, or am I just losing my mind?

Kevin Gardiner
Whitevale, Ontario

There's nothing wrong with your mind, Kevin. It could be that some of the characters in that pack just happen to have names that turn into other names when you spell them backward . . . or it could be that somebody on the design team decided to have a little fun.

—Gib Mik

Look no further

Dear Dragon,

I've been searching desperately for two books that I have discovered are out of print, or at least so I'm told. First is the *Outer Planes Appendix* of the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessory, and the second is from the TOP SECRETS/S.I.™ game and I believe is called *G4, The Guide to Guns, Gadgets, and Getaway Gear*. I'm hoping maybe you have some suggestions for where to look.

Jeremy Woolsey
Grand Forks, B. C.

I have suggestions galore, Jeremy. Here goes: Although it may be difficult or impossible to find in stores anymore, the Outer Planes Appendix is still available from TSR's Mail Order Hobby Shop. You can place an order by calling the Hobby Shop's toll-free number 1-800-558-5977 from 8A.M. to 5P.M. Monday through Friday. You also can ask to be sent a free catalog of all the Hobby Shop's merchandise, which includes limited supplies of some old TSR products you can't get anywhere else.

The news isn't as good on The Guide, which is many years old and long out of print. There might be people out there willing to sell one to you, but we have no way of knowing who they are. Good luck in your search.

Finally Jeremy's letter gives us a chance to announce a couple of new services being offered by TSR that could answer a lot of questions for a lot of people. You now can call a toll-free number, 1-800-384-4TSR, to find out the name of the store nearest you that sells TSR products. And if you have a question about any TSR product, call Rob Taylor at 1-414-248-2902 he'll do the best he can to tell you what you need to know.

—Kim

Thanks, Dino

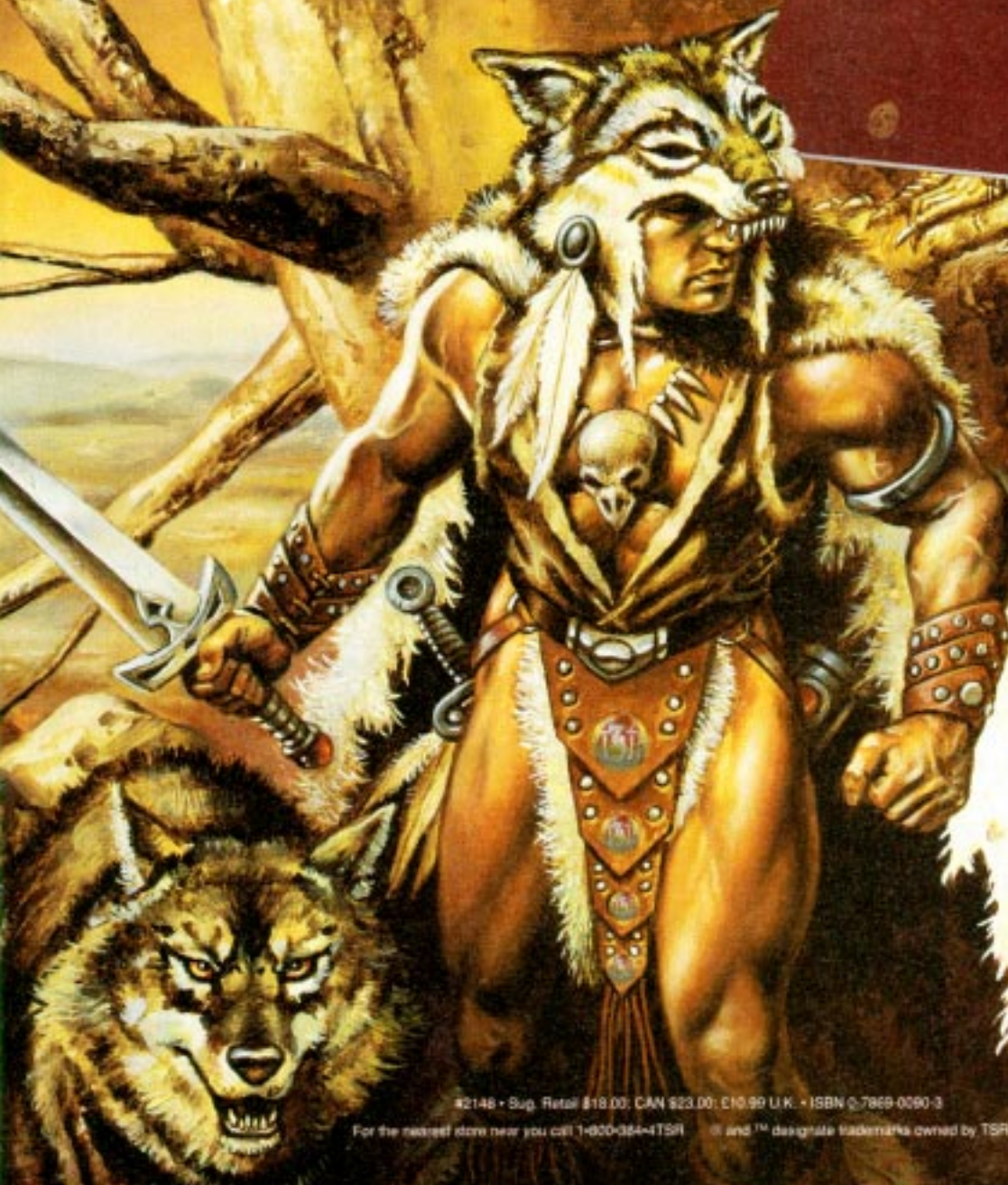
Dear Dragon,

I have been an avid reader of your magazine for some time. In the last three months, however, four events have transpired that will forever change the way I view the good people at TSR.

First, after three years of buying DRAGON Magazine from my local bookstore, I finally convinced myself to subscribe.

Continued on page 118

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Editorial

Last issue, Larry Smith asked the readers of *Dragon*® Magazine for their thoughts, opinions, and concerns regarding gaming and the direction this magazine should take in the future. Your literate and enlightening responses have begun to arrive on our doorstep (thanks, we appreciate the effort!), but some of your comments have been a bit . . . vague. In order to best accommodate your wishes, we need you to be as specific as you can be when you contact us. Since I've been around this magazine for over five years now and like to think that I know it pretty well, I thought I'd take it upon myself to help you narrow the focus of your letters and e-mail messages. For those of you who've already contacted us, please use the list below to re-examine the comments you've given us. If you've not informed us of your opinions, why not take the time right now to read through this list, formulate your thoughts, and drop us a line. (If you put it off until later, you may never get back to it. I know, I do that all the time.)

DRAGON Magazine is ultimately defined not by the editorial staff, but by its readers who pluck down their hard-earned bucks each month. So, pick up a pen or sit down at the keyboard and tell us what you really think. Please explain why you feel the way you do. You don't need to delve into excruciating detail, but a sentence or two detailing the reasons for your choice would be most helpful. The questions are in no particular order (just like my office).

Themes: Do you like the idea of having the front section of the magazine devoted to articles all linked by a common theme? Which themes do you find most useful in your game campaigns? Which themes do you find the least helpful? Should we drop the whole concept of themes? Should we increase the size (page count) of the theme section?

Reviews: Which review columns do you regularly read? Which columns do you never read? Should we publish more (game, computer, book, miniatures) reviews? For the games, computers, and miniatures columns with multiple reviewers, do you tend to agree with Reviewer "A" more often than with Reviewer "B"? Do you read columns only by a certain reviewer? (If so, tell us whose columns you do agree with or read most often.)



Features: Of the columns and departments that appear in every issue of the magazine (such as the *FIRST QUEST*™, "Letters," "Sage Advice," "TSR Previews" columns, and so on), which do you find the most entertaining to read or the most helpful to your games? Are there too many of this type of article?

DRAGON Magazine has another variety of feature article: the "Arcane Lore," "Dragon's Bestiary," "The Wizards Three," and other columns that do not show up in every issue but that appear regularly. Which of these do you most look forward to reading and using in your game world? We've created a few new columns in the last year or two ("Elminster's Notebook," "Rumblings," and "Campaign Journal"); which of these do you most enjoy?

Genres/Settings: Are there genres of gaming (science fiction, superhero, horror, Victorian-era, etc.) that you'd like to see more coverage of in the magazine (if so, which)? Are there AD&D® game settings that we give too much coverage to in the pages of the magazine? Which new games or settings would you like to have more

coverage of (the *COUNCIL OF WYRMS*™, *Masque of the Red Death*, or the *PLANESCAPE*™ campaigns, or R. Talsorian's *CASTLE FALKENSTEIN**, White Wolfs *WRAITH**, or West End's *MASTERBOOK** games)? Should the magazine cover more products from other publishers? (If so, which products?) Should the magazine publish articles on fantasy, SF, or historical board games? Do you prefer articles that focus on only one game system or general articles that are pertinent to entire genres of role-playing games?

Contributors: Who are your favorite authors for the magazine? Whose artwork just blows you away every time it appears in the magazine? Who is your favorite cover artist? Do you like to read articles by TSR staff members about new game products and the inner workings (such as they are) of TSR, Inc.? Should the magazine publish more material written by game designers from other companies?

Miscellaneous: (The following is a hodgepodge of questions that don't fit into any of the above categories.) What don't you like about *DRAGON Magazine*? (Remember to be specific; we can take it.) What's the one topic you've always wanted to read about in the magazine? Should the magazine cover fantasy and science fiction from other media such as TV, movies, and comic books? If you could change any one aspect of *DRAGON Magazine*, what would it be? How would you change it?

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Dale A. Donovan

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by Harold "Wisconsin" Johnson

Hats. I like to wear hats, all sorts of hats. Ask anybody at the GEN CON® Game Fair. "Where's Harold? He's over there somewhere. Just look for a guy in a brown fedora."

I've been wearing hats all my life, literally and metaphorically. Just ask anyone at TSR. "What's Harold's job? Which one? He wears so many different hats."

So when Dale asked me to write about my first experiences in role-playing, I had to ask, "Which one? Do you mean adventure gaming?"

"Look, just read a couple of the other FIRST QUEST™ articles in previous issues to get an idea," he said, rolling his eyes as if I'd asked which shoe to put on first. Fine. So I read them. I read them all.

After an hour I came to the conclusion that this column shouldn't be called FIRST QUEST, it should be called ANNOYING QUEST. Every installment showed that TSR employees loved to play characters to annoy other players and DMs. Hmmm? Now that's an interesting hat to try on. I bet I've got them all beat. I've played ten times more characters and annoyed ten times more players in my history as a role-player.

In my high school years in Lincoln, Nebraska, way back in the late '60s, one of the hats I wore was the class weirdo. Some people would have called me a nerd, but thanks to Bill Cosby, I was called "ol' weird Harold."

I was a history and science major, a member of the science and chess clubs, and a co-founder of one of the early *Star Trek* fan clubs. All of which was really an excuse to play games, all sorts of games. War games, strategy games, miniatures games, assassin games, water-fight games, mystery games, and we even created our own naval computer game requiring you to guess the distance and angle to the target. We played party games, and role-played even before the term was coined. We called it "having fun!"

A second hat I wore at the time was that of a professional entertainer, writer, and playwright. I performed on stage, radio, and television for years, mostly character acting, though I did win a local award for my portrayal of Faust. Once again, I was already role-playing, I just didn't know the pastime had a name.

Eventually, I survived my youth and went off for my senior years of college to Northwestern University to pursue my future, a fateful move if ever there was

one, for it put me in close proximity to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, the birth place of role-playing. In those days I was not quick in making friends, and my first year was all studying and no gaming! I don't know how I survived. Luckily, as the summer of 1975 rolled around, I packed my bags and returned home.

Upon arrival, I was met by my old gaming comrades and regaled with tales of a great new game, called the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, which they insisted I try. "It's like playing a part in a fairy tale, only you ad-lib the story as you go." I could do that I thought, but what about the rules? I was shown three photocopied books (it was years before I ever saw an actual copy of the game) and was pretty daunted. "Oh don't worry about it. You don't need to read the rules. We'll tell you what you have to do as we play." Okay then, let's get on with it.

On our third day of gaming, we decided to pull an all-nighter. I raided a prop attic of a local theater group and came loaded with prop chests, bags, treasures, rubber snakes and spiders, and more. I had vanilla wafers for gold coins and hard candies for gems. We were ready to overindulge in gaming. Unfortunately, as 9 P.M. rolled around, our DM packed up his stuff and said that was it, he was tired and going home. We were stunned. What could we do?

Never a bright fellow, I tried on a new hat and said, "Hey guys, I can create an adventure on the spot. That's no big deal. I just don't know the rules, if someone wants to co-judge, I'll be the DM." What choice did they have? So half an hour later, after some hasty sketching of what became the core of my campaign world, I embarked on the grand mysteries of running a fantasy RPG.

Now role-playing a hero is fun, but just imagine what it's like to suddenly be the center of attention, playing a dozen different characters simultaneously, each with a unique character voice (I was once called as having 39 different character voices) and entertaining everyone. The ego rush was huge, like performing on stage for a small audience. It was great, and the players thought so too. Unfortunately, this meant a premature retirement for my career as a player, as the rest of the summer I became the group's resident DM.

No problem, I thought. When I get back to Northwestern, I'll find a gaming group and bring my hero out of retirement.

Wrong. I couldn't find a gaming group, so I had to organize my own, and now I was the veteran, so I had to be the DM for the group.

My first players were Rai Kunstmanas (a Lithuanian name, small world, ay?) and David White. We experimented with several new things. Using the EN GARDE* game rules we developed backgrounds for our characters. Bored with dungeon crawls (I didn't have time to design a dungeon and could just ad-lib wilderness adventures) our adventures explored the wilderness, warfare, story-telling, and mythology. We invented new rules for swimming, acrobatics, and merchant trading. I continued to build a repertoire of stock characters to delight and annoy players.

Some of my favorites were the loquacious bartender, the crotchety old gypsy, the cowardly goblin, and the angry ogre. In addition to this stock, I created a set of 13 unique powerful personalities that created motivation for intrigue, politics, and adventures in my world. One of the most notable was a befuddled old wizard named Rislán, who was more powerful than he knew, and despite his senility always lucked out with the right spell. Rislán was one of the inspirations for another befuddled mage named Fizban of the DRAGONLANCE® Saga fame (though both Tracy Hickman and Jeff Grubb had their own prototype mad mages as well).

In the summer of 1976, I found a new hat to try on; I attended my first GEN CON Game Fair, the first one officially managed by TSR. There I complained about the lack of role-playing events, and the poor quality of DMs to one of the organizers. He responded by drafting Rai and myself to create and run our own tournament at the show. Our game was the last one running at the close of the show. I've been running events at the Game Fair ever since.

As a result of running events at Game Fairs a friend from the Northwestern gaming group started recruiting me to run events on the spur of the moment at the FALL REVEL and WINTER FANTASY™ Game Fairs. It was there that I learned to create an adventure using a spring board, a generic event chart, and the players' feedback to create spur of the moment adventures to remember.

It all began with one very trying adventure. Every hero present exhibited some major flaw, and I decided to exploit these.

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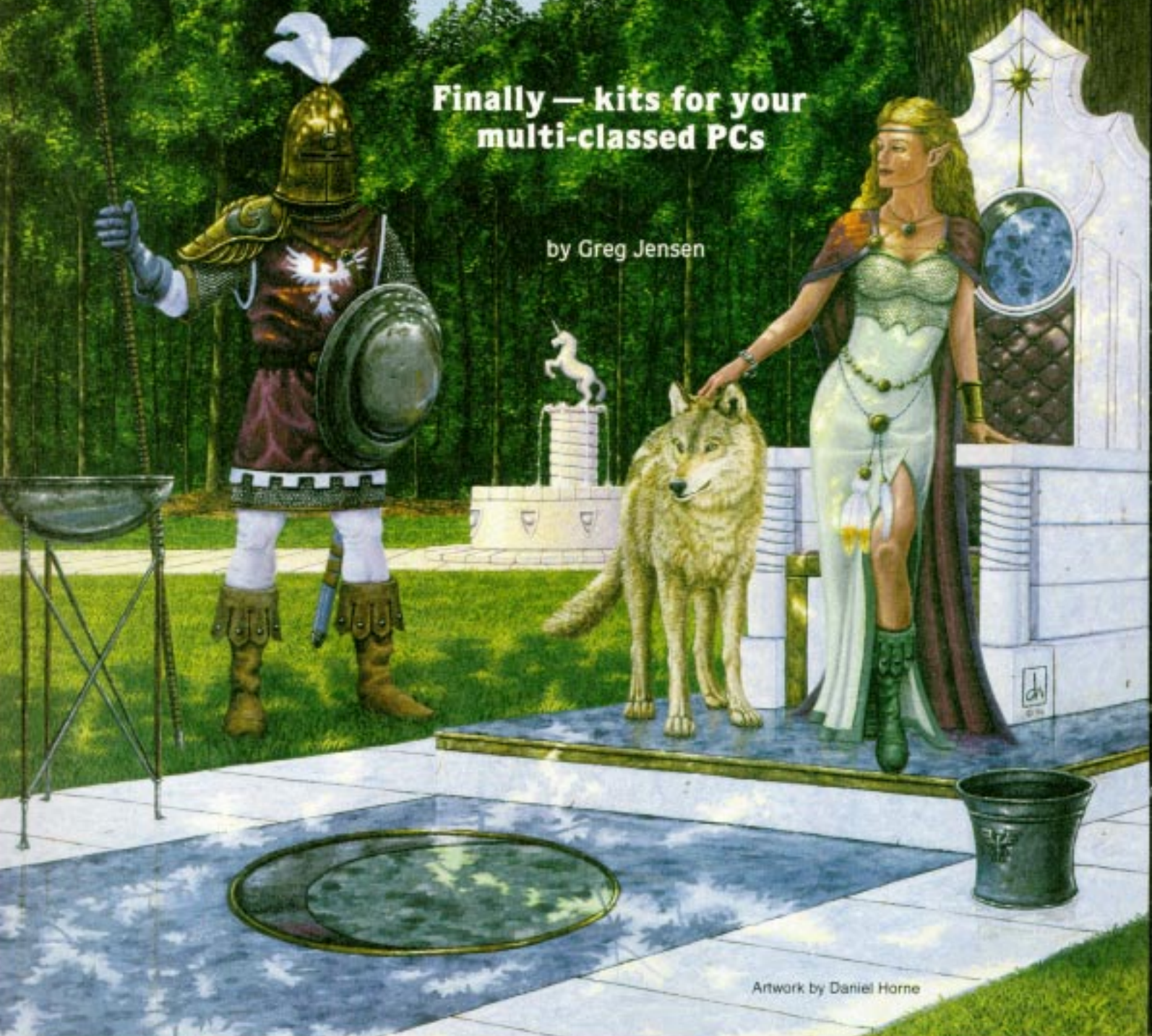


keyword: TSR

The Complete Half-Elf

Finally — kits for your
multi-classed PCs

by Greg Jensen



Artwork by Daniel Horne

My favorite PC race in the AD&D® game also is the race with the least written about it. Half-elves are living enigmas, spanning two cultural worlds, and are outcasts from both. Prejudice is a daily reality for half-elves. They are not fully accepted by either their human or elven contemporaries due to their mixed heritage and the stereotypes each race attributes to the other. Humans tend to see half-elves as frivolous and lazy wastrels, who will steal your money and your daughter without a thought. Elves (particularly Gray and Sylvan) tend to see half-elves as greedy and power-hungry, with little or no respect for nature. None of these assumptions are necessarily true.

Being raised in such an environment gives half-elves a unique perspective of the world. They lack the fierce racial loyalty of most other races, therefore they tend to rely more on themselves. This self-reliance, combined with relatively long life spans and learning ability, make half-elves the most versatile characters of all. If you count the multi-classed combinations, half-elves have more classes open to them than any other race.

The character kits presented in the PHBR series help to greatly expand a character's role and motivation. Most of the multi-classed combinations for half-elves have no character kits. This article alleviates this lack by presenting kits for multi-classed half-elves, finally giving such characters identity. Please note that no kits for single-classed half-elves are presented here as those presented in the PHBR series (*Complete Fighter's Handbook*, *Complete Thief's Handbook*, *Complete Priest's Handbook*, *Complete Bard's Handbook*, and *Complete Ranger's Handbook*), are in most cases just as appropriate to half-elves as to humans. Also note that some kits from the *Complete Book of Elves* also may fit a half-elven character. Check with your DM first, as some kits, such as the Spellfilcher and the Blade-singer, are usually available only to elves.

Note: Nonweapon proficiencies marked with * are found in *The Complete Thief's Handbook*. A ** indicates a proficiency from *The Complete Bard's Handbook*.

Fighter/Thief kits

Shadowblade

Description: The Shadowblade is considered an elite member of the thieving community. She is a dark and foreboding character combining the subtlety of a thief with the deadly skills of a warrior. Many thieves' guilds will have one or two in their employ. Other Shadowblades hire themselves out to the highest bidder. Whether it's assassination, bounty hunting, enforcing, or just plain larceny, if there is a roguish job that requires some extra muscle, the Shadowblade is the person to call.

Requirements: Shadowblades must have a Strength of 13 or greater, and a Dexterity of 12 or higher. As with all thieves, they may not be of Lawful Good alignment.

Role: As many half-elves find little acceptance with the mainstream society, they often feel more at home with thieves' guilds (who pragmatically appreciate their multi-faceted talents). Shadowblades are well known and respected in the underworld for their fighting skills.

Secondary skills: Any.

Weapon proficiencies: A Shadowblade may spend her weapon proficiencies any way she wishes. Whether or not multi-classed fighters are normally allowed to specialize in weapons, the Shadowblade character should have this option.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* Information Gathering*, Intimidation*, Thieves' Cant. *Recommended:* Blind-fighting, Disguise, Jumping, Tumbling, Endurance, Tracking, Weaponsmithing, and Alertness *.

Skill progression: Shadowblades usually progress about equally in their thief skills. The exception is Pick Pockets, which they tend to find unimportant.

Equipment: No special equipment is preferred. Like all multi-classed thieves, Shadowblades may not use any thief skills but Read Languages, Detect Noise, and Open Locks in armor heavier than leather.

Special benefits: Shadowblades are well respected in the underworld and therefore receive a +2 to all reaction rolls from thieves who know of the character's

status. Shadowblades also gain a +10% to Hide in Shadows, and a +5% bonus to their Move Silently skills.

Special hindrances: Regardless of actual alignment, Shadowblades have a notorious reputation and therefore receive a -2 to reactions from non-thieves and -4 reaction from law enforcement officials if they know of the Shadowblade status. Shadowblades also receive a -10% penalty to the Pick Pockets ability.

Military Scout

Description: The Military Scout has many differences from the scout kit in the *Complete Thief's Handbook*, not the least of which is an increased fighting ability. This is a well-rounded intelligence gatherer, as much a spy and guerrilla warrior as a wilderness thief.

Requirements: The Military Scout must have a Strength and Dexterity of 10 or more and an Intelligence of 11 or higher. They cannot be lawful good.

Role: Just as the Shadowblade finds acceptance in a thieves' guild, some half-elves find their niche in a standing army. In the military, a half-elf's talents usually don't go unnoticed, and their ability to combine skills makes them excellent scouts. They are trained for reconnaissance, sabotage, and other intelligence gathering, sometimes even infiltrating enemy camps. As the opportunity for treason is high for military scouts, they are treated better than the common soldier to maintain loyalty.

Secondary skills: Required: Bowyer/Fletcher, Fisher, Forester, Hunter, or Trapper/Furrier.

Weapon proficiencies: Military Scouts must be proficient with a knife. The other proficiencies may be filled as the player wishes. Military Scouts may not specialize in weapon use.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Direction Sense, Disguise, and Survival or Tracking. Recommended: Alertness*, Fire Building, Fishing, Modern Languages, Weather Sense, Set Snares, Endurance, Running.

Skills progression: Hide in Shadows, and Move Silently are favored skills. Pick Pockets and Open Locks are the least important, but they still may be helpful in information gathering.

Equipment: Scouts usually have standard outdoor equipment: rations, a bedroll, a knife, rope, etc. They usually take equipment specific to the mission they are on, often including a disguise kit.

Special benefits: When in a wilderness setting, Military Scouts have a bonus of +10% to the following thief skills: Find/Remove Traps, Move Silently, Hide in Shadows, Detect Noise, and Climb Walls (for trees and cliffs). Military Scouts have a patron who can provide aid, usually a standing military unit. This is mostly a role-playing consideration.

Special hindrances: In an urban

setting, Military Scouts have a -5% penalty to all thief skills except Pick Pockets, Open Locks, and Read Languages. Having a patron can be a hindrance as well as a benefit. Scouts must report to their commanders, and may be called on missions that go against the plans of the adventuring party.

Fighter/Cleric kit Crusader

Description: A Crusader is a half-elf devoted to spreading of his faith. The Crusader seeks to defend the faithful, combat the church's enemies, and bring his religion to the heathens.

Specialty priests: If the *Complete Priest's Handbook* is being used, the following priesthoods may have Crusaders as well as clerics: Community, Culture, Death, Everything, Evil, Fire, Good, Guardianship, Justice/Revenge, Race (half-elf), Redemption, Strength, War, and Wisdom.

Requirements: Crusaders must have a Strength of 13 or greater, a Wisdom of 14 or higher, and a Charisma of 12 or greater. They may not be of chaotic alignment, as chaotic people hold the individual's freedom as or more important than the morals the Crusaders attempt to spread. Although most Crusaders are good, some are more interested in destroying "infidels" than in protecting the faithful. That type of Crusader may be neutral or evil.

Role: This is as close to a paladin as a demihuman can get. Like their human cousins, Crusaders are holy warriors who stand for a cause. However, this cause is not always lawful good, although most Crusaders are lawful good. Crusaders always put the interest of their faith ahead of their party.

Secondary skills: Required: Armorer, Weaponsmith, or Scribe.

Weapon proficiencies: The Crusader may spend his weapon proficiencies as is wished. However, a crusader must abide by the weapon restrictions of his faith.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Religion. **Recommended:** Etiquette, Heraldry, Modern Languages, Riding (Land-based), Ancient History, Spellcraft, Blind-fighting, and Endurance.

Equipment: Crusaders should get the heaviest armor and most deadly weapon they can afford and that their priesthood will allow.

Special benefits: When in combat against a member of an opposing religion or philosophy (the DM will decide which priesthoods and creatures qualify), or in defense of their own priesthood's followers, the Crusader gains a bonus of +1 on attack and damage rolls. Crusaders have a permanent +1 to all saving throws.

Special hindrances: A Crusader must serve his priesthood first and foremost. The Crusader must try to convert or fight those who oppose his religion, and defend followers of the Crusader's religion with his life.

Fighter/Druid kit

Wilderness Avenger

Description: When nature is wantonly abused and destroyed, those who care will try to stop it. These people will use force if necessary. Normally these individuals are rangers. If the one destroying nature is very unlucky, it will be a Wilderness Avenger. These people are similar to rangers, but rangers always show at least a little mercy toward their opponents. Wilderness Avengers are not so forgiving. While not evil, they are more inclined to believe the end justifies the means.

Specialty priests: If the *Complete Priest's Handbook* is being used, the following priesthoods may have Wilderness Avengers, as well as druids: Agriculture, Animals, Earth, Elemental Forces, Fertility, Hunting, Life/Death/Rebirth Cycle, Race (half-elf), Seasons, and Vegetation.

Requirements: Wilderness Avengers must have a Strength and Constitution of 14 or greater, a Wisdom of 12 or higher, and a Charisma of 15 or greater. Neutrality must be an element of their alignment. They still must abide by the alignment restrictions of their priesthood.

Role: Where rangers protect people and natural creatures, Wilderness Avengers are merely trying to preserve the natural balance, and are not picky about how they do so. They allow some hunting and harvesting of wild animals and plants (DMs: Please use common sense in determining this), but if it upsets the balance of nature, Wilderness Avengers are not averse to using militant methods to stop it. Wilderness Avengers normally get along well with rangers, people they are often confused with. They see the rangers' overprotectiveness of the good races as a flaw, however. They draw their power from being in tune with the forces of nature rather than a reverence for life.

Secondary skills: Required: Forester.

Weapon proficiencies: Scimitar and one missile weapon (whether or not these are allowed by the priesthood). All other weapon proficiencies must be allowed by the avenger's priesthood.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Tracking, Survival, Animal Lore. **Recommended:** Agriculture, Animal Handling, Animal Training, Alertness*, Direction Sense, Weather Sense, Herbalist, Hunting, Fishing, Set Snares.

Equipment: Wilderness Avengers may not wear metal armor, but may use metal shields if allowed by their priesthood.

Special benefits: A Wilderness Avenger gains a bonus of +1 on attack and damage rolls when fighting "unnatural" creatures. Such creatures include those of extraplanar origin, undead, golems, and artificially created beings. A Wilderness Avenger also gains a 5% chance to hide in natural surroundings and move silently per level (use highest level; i.e., a 2nd/3rd level fighter/druid Wilderness Avenger would have 15% in both skills).

Special hindrances: Wilderness Avengers are rugged and unkempt looking, thereby receiving a -3 to reactions in urban social settings. They cannot specialize in weapon use. A Wilderness Avenger will not let an act of destruction against nature go unavenged.

Fighter/Mage kits Spellarcher

Description: Spellarchers belong to a fraternity of half-elves fighting prejudice and oppression. They fight to change the rules of society with both arms and magic. They combine the two, using their arrows to increase the range of some spells.

Requirements: Spellarchers must have a Strength of 9 or greater, and Dexterity and Intelligence scores of 15 or higher. They must be chaotic in alignment.

Role: Spellarchers are a self-proclaimed group of half-elf freedom fighters. They study magic in an unusual way; combining it with archery. The method of spellarchery has so far remained a mystery to all but these half-elves. If a Spellarcher tries to teach this to someone of another race, other Spellarchers will hunt her down and put an end to student and teacher permanently.

Secondary skills: Required: Bowyer/Fletcher.

Weapon proficiencies: Required: Spellarchers must specialize with the long bow. They may not specialize in any other weapon. The remaining weapon proficiency slot may be filled as the player wishes.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Bowyer/Fletcher, Spellcraft. Recommended: Fire-building, Herbalist, Reading/Writing, Blind-fighting, Hunting, Running, Survival.

Equipment: All Spellarchers start out with a finely-crafted long bow (+1 bonus to material saving throws) and a quiver of flight arrows free of charge.

Special benefits: Spellarchers have the ability to cast touch-delivered spells onto their arrows and fire those arrows normally. This allows such touch-delivered spells to affect targets out of reach of the Spellarcher. Obviously, spells that can be cast only on the character's self, such as *change* self or *chill touch* are ineligible for this ability. The spell-carrying arrow must strike its target (i.e., a successful attack roll) for the spell to take effect. All normal saving throw attempts are allowed. Note that even if the target makes his save vs. the spell, he still takes damage from the arrow. If the arrow misses its target, the spell is lost. (DMs: One possible exception to this is if the spell-carrying arrow strikes a viable target for the spell other than the one the Spellarcher intended to hit. Use the grenade-like missile rules and scatter diagram on pages 62-63 of the *DMG* to determine where the errant missile falls.)

Special hindrances: Spellarchers may not cast spells from the school of divination. They may never wear any armor.

Spellarchers must aid the cause of half-elves over the rules of elves, humans, and other races.

Aristocrat

Description: Occasionally a human noble and an elf will marry. Their half-elf children are brought up in luxury, with the best schools and tutors money can buy. Although almost any character may be a member of the aristocracy, not all are eligible for the Aristocrat kit. The Aristocrat is a foppish, swashbuckling dandy who combines swordplay with lessons in sorcery. The Aristocrat is the epitome of elegance and wit.

Requirements: Aristocrat PCs must have a Strength of 9 or greater, and Dexterity and Intelligence scores of 13 or higher, and a Charisma of at least 14.

Role: The Aristocrat excels at three arts: fencing, sorcery, and looking good. She prefers to use light "gentleman's" weapons rather than the bastard swords and battle axes. Aristocrats' abilities and status make them tend to feel that they are better than others. This usually annoys other characters, but their wit and charm makes Aristocrats hard not to like. The Aristocrat can be honorable and naive, a fun-loving prankster, or a spoiled machiavellian conspirator.

Secondary skills: Usually none; Aristocrats don't need to earn a living.

Weapon proficiencies: All the Aristocrat's initial proficiencies must be filled with the following weapons: main gauche, rapier, sabre, stiletto, and crossbow (hand or light). The Aristocrat may specialize in one of the above weapons, and once specialized, she may never specialize in another weapon.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Etiquette, Heraldry, Reading/Writing. Recommended: Animal Handling, Animal Training (falcon), Dancing, Riding (Land-based), Appraising, Disguise, Gaming, Tumbling, Spellcraft, Musical Instrument.

Equipment: See below.

Special benefits: The Aristocrat starts with twice as much money as a normal fighter. She also may be able to demand shelter in many places (especially from other nobles). Aristocrats may take rogue proficiencies at the normal cost. Because of an Aristocrat's debonair charm, a bonus of +3 is given on reaction rolls to members of the opposite sex. When armed with the specialized weapon, the Aristocrat gets a +1 bonus to her armor class due to extensive training from childhood.

Special hindrances: An Aristocrat will not tolerate shoddy goods and services, and demands the best that money can buy. In game terms, this relates to being charged 1.5 to 2 times the normal prices for items. Less may be accepted in an emergency, but if it becomes a habit the Benefits of this kit can be lost. Other wealthy individuals also may demand shelter from the Aristocrat.

Cleric/Ranger kit Rescuer

Description: Getting lost or injured in the wilderness can be a fatal experience in a fantasy campaign. The frequency of man-eating monsters and infrequency of fellow travelers to provide aid makes such a predicament seem hopeless. Luckily, some half-elves have devoted their lives to the humanitarian cause of finding and aiding those who require help, be they human, demihuman, humanoid, or animal.

Requirements: A Rescuer requires a Strength of 14 or greater, a Dexterity of 13 or higher, and a Wisdom of at least 15. Like all rangers, a good alignment is required.

Role: For religious or moral reasons, the Rescuer finds fulfillment in helping others. Although usually a member of an organized religion, the Rescuer finds true spiritual communion in the majesty of nature rather than in a man-made church. The Rescuer's goals may not fit in with the party's goals, as she feels the need to provide help to any unfortunates. Many parties would do well to learn from the Rescuer's example.

Specialty priests: If the *Complete Priest's Handbook* is being used, the following priesthoods may have Rescuers: Animals, Culture, Dawn, Everything, Good, Guardianship, Healing, Light, Moon, Nature, Oracles/Prophecy, Peace, Race (half-elf), Redemption, Strength, Sun, and Wisdom.

Secondary skills: Any.

Weapon proficiencies: None are required. Weapons chosen must be allowed by the PC's priesthood.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Bonus: Tracking, Survival, Healing. Recommended: Direction Sense, Fire-building, Rope Use, Weather Sense, Herbalist, Religion, Animal Lore, Endurance, Hunting, Mountaineering.

Equipment: A Rescuer should have standard outdoor equipment, as well as a healing kit.

Special benefits: The innate kindness of a Rescuer always seems to shine through, giving her a +3 bonus on reaction rolls to good or neutral beings. Because a Rescuer draws spiritual power from nature as well as a deity, any healing spell cast in natural surroundings receives a +1 point per die bonus to hit points regained. Any animal followers of the Rescuer may be trained to help locate and escort people to safety automatically after being with the Rescuer for one month.

Special hindrance: A Rescuer must aid any living creature in need if she is able. This rule does not extend to the character's species enemy, or to nonliving creatures, such as undead. Although Rescuers will fight and kill in self-defense or in the defense of their allies, they try to heal friends and enemies alike after the battle is over. Rescuers may kill creatures for food to feed themselves and their allies.

Mage/Cleric kit Arcanist

Description: The Arcanist is a half-elf in search of esoteric knowledge, arcane lore, and spiritual enlightenment. An Arcanist's entire life is devoted to gaining knowledge of the supernatural. Because of a half-elf's dual-world upbringing, many do not think along conventional lines. Thus, the Arcanist considers priestly magic and wizardry to be merely extensions of one another. The Arcanist considers himself to be a practitioner of an entirely different, more pure form of magic, and hopes to eventually attain mastery of all spells.

Requirements: The Arcanist must have Intelligence and Wisdom scores of at least 15.

Specialty priests: If the *Complete Priest's Handbook* is being used, all forces and philosophies may have Arcanists, as well as the deities of Ancestors, Arts, Culture, Darkness/Night, Dawn, Death, Everything, Fertility, Fate/Destiny, Light, Magic, Messengers, Mischief/Trickery, Moon, Oracles/Prophecy, Peace, Race (half-elf), Sites, Sun, Time, War, and Wisdom.

Role: The Arcanist is a very useful addition to a party, not only for the benefits of his spells, but also for the vast knowledge of various mystical subjects this character possesses. This character is fascinated by all forms of magic and is constantly seeking to add to his store of arcane knowledge, and will often accompany adventures just to encounter new magical items, spells, or creatures.

Secondary skills: *Required:* Scribe.

Weapon proficiencies: Any allowed by the priesthood.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* Ancient History, Reading/Writing, Religion, Spellcraft. *Recommended:* Heraldry, Ancient Languages, Astrology, Herbalist.

Equipment: Aside from spell books and religious symbols, none are required. Only elven chain mail may be worn by Arcanists.

Special benefits: The Arcanist has an ability similar to the Bard's magical-item identification (legend lore) ability. The Arcanist has a 5% chance per level to identify the history and background of any magical item she encounters.

Special hindrances: The Arcanist has a "spooky" feel to her, and has a -2 reaction penalty to all characters except spellcasters (wizards, priests, paladins, rangers, and bards).

Thief /Mage kits Guild Mage

Description: A wizard can be a very useful addition to a thieves' guild. A sleep spell on guards, *invisibility*, *spider climb*, *darkness*, *Tenser's floating disk*, and many other spells are invaluable in pulling off a heist. Many thieves' guilds have therefore found it in their best interest to hire a Guild Mage or two. Although elves and

gnomes (and dual-classed humans) may be employed by guilds as resident mage/thieves, only half-elves are eligible for the Guild Mage kit.

Requirements: Guild Mages require Dexterity and Intelligence scores of 13 or greater. They may not be lawful good.

Role: As stated under the Shadowblade Kit, many half-elves find the acceptance lacking in their communities to exist in a thieves' guild, and guilds make use of half-elves' multi-faceted talents. Half-elves that show both magical and larcenous promise are trained to be Guild Mages.

Secondary skills: Any.

Weapon proficiencies: Any normally allowed to thieves.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* Information Gathering*, Reading/Writing, Thieves' Cant. *Recommended:* Disguise, Forgery, Gaming, Local History, Ventriloquism.

Skill progression: Guild Mages have no preference.

Equipment: No special equipment is needed by most Guild Mages. They may not wear any armor.

Special benefits: Due to his close association with professional thieves, a Guild Mage gains a bonus of +5% to his abilities to Open Locks, Hide in Shadows, and Climb Walls.

Special hindrances: A Guild Mage is not used for petty thefts, and has a -15% penalty to his Pick Pockets skill.

Prestidigitator

Description: This mage/thief is similar to the bard in that they both have a talent for entertaining crowds. The Prestidigitator, however, not only entertains crowds, but robs them blind as well. A showman and con man, a Prestidigitator exemplifies the trickster.

Requirements: An Intelligence of 12 or greater, a Dexterity of 11 or higher, and a Charisma of 15 or greater are required of the Prestidigitator. They may not be lawful good.

Role: A Prestidigitator is a half-elf who turned to magic as a means of getting attention, but was always a rogue at heart. Often, mages will earn a living showing off their magical skills to entertainment-starved crowds. A Prestidigitator combines sleight-of-hand with real magic to excel in this career. She also can boost her income by picking a few pockets at the show, and burgling a few houses before moving on to the next village.

Secondary skills: *Required:* Gambler.

Weapon proficiencies: Any available to thieves, but they prefer small, easily concealed weapons such as knives.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* Crowd Working*, Observation. * *Recommended:* Animal training, Etiquette, Modern Languages, Local History, Disguise, Gaming, Ventriloquism, and Fast Talking. *

Skill progression: The Prestidigitator makes use of the Pick Pockets skill far

more than any others. All other skills are useful to help get the character out of sticky situations when luck runs out.

Special benefits: The Prestidigitator has two main abilities. The first is sleight-of-hand or prestidigitation. With a successful Pick Pockets roll, the Prestidigitator can perform simple yet impressive tricks of "stage magic." The DM should modify this roll to fit the situation as is appropriate. For instance, palming a small coin should be done at a +15% bonus, while making a small animal (like a rabbit) disappear should have a -15% penalty. Obviously, making something the size of an elephant disappear would take a lot of preparation or real magic to pull off. Although not a specialist, the Prestidigitator prefers spells from the schools of illusion/phantasm and conjuration/summoning. She gains a bonus of +5% to learn spells from these schools.

Special hindrances: Prestidigitators suffer a -5% penalty to learn spells from any school other than the two listed above. Half of a Prestidigitator's initial discretionary thiefly skill points must go to the Pick Pockets skill.

Fighter/Mage/Cleric kit Redeemer

Description: A Redeemer is a half-elf who combines spiritual, martial, and magical skills to help destroy a foe. He is a serious character dedicated to bringing vengeance on a nemesis. Generally, this foe also is an enemy of the church, and the Redeemer considers this creature to be an abomination.

Requirements: A Redeemer must have Strength, Wisdom, and Intelligence scores of 14 or greater and also must be of lawful alignment due to his intense dedication to the destruction of a specific enemy.

Specialty priests: If the *Complete Priest's Handbook* is being used, the following priesthoods may also have Redeemers: Competition, Culture, Everything, Evil, Good, Justice/Revenge, Light, Race (half-elf), Redemption, and War.

Role: A Redeemer has made it his life's purpose to hunt down and kill a certain foe. Often this is because of a childhood tragedy that the Redeemer feels compelled to avenge. This intensity often makes the Redeemer seem to be grim and brooding. The Redeemer will try to persuade other characters to aid this personal war.

Secondary skills: Any.

Weapon proficiencies: Any allowed by the PC's priesthood. Redeemers may not specialize in weapon use.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* Ancient History (for species enemy), Blind-fighting. *Recommended:* Religion, Spellcraft, Endurance, Hunting, Tracking, Weaponsmithing.

Equipment: Redeemers always carry any weapons or items specifically designed to take advantage of a foe's weaknesses. For example, if the species enemy is were-

wolves, the Redeemer will never leave home without a good supply of silvered weapons. Redeemers may cast wizard spells only when clad in elven chain mail or no armor.

Special benefits: The Redeemer has a special species enemy of the player's choice, similar to a ranger. The character has a bonus of +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls, and a +1 bonus to armor class when fighting that creature only.

Special hindrances: A Redeemer's hatred for his species enemy runs deep, and may become irrational. If an opportunity to attack a species enemy occurs and the player does not wish his character to attack, the character must roll under his Wisdom to avoid taking this action.

Fighter/Mage/Thief kits Dilettante

Description: A Dilettante is a half-elf who has difficulty finding a niche. As a result, she becomes the proverbial "jack of all trades, master of none," drifting from profession to profession.

Requirements: A Dilettante must have a 12 or greater in all characteristics except Wisdom, as Dilettantes often, but not always, lack self-discipline implied by a high Wisdom score. They also lack the dedication to be of any lawful alignment.

Role: Dilettantes have trouble staying with one job for very long, but this is certainly not due to any lack of talent or intelligence. Along their way, they dabble in warrior, rogue, and mage skills, among others. Dilettantes usually are from one of the upper classes, much like Aristocrats, for the lower classes are not often afforded the opportunity to drift through various crafts. Many humans also resemble Dilettantes, but they don't have as long of a life span as half-elves, and therefore don't learn as many skills as a Dilettante.

Secondary skills: A Dilettante should roll 1d6 times for secondary skills.

Weapon proficiencies: Any. As with most skills, Dilettantes may not specialize in weapon use.

Nonweapon proficiencies: *Bonus:* None, but see "Special benefits" below. *Recommended:* Any.

Equipment: No special equipment is required of the Dilettante. They prefer goods and services of the highest quality, but this is not a requirement.

Special benefits: Dilettantes may choose nonweapon proficiencies from the warrior, mage, and rogue groups at normal cost. Further, they get three extra nonweapon proficiency slots.

Special hindrances: A Dilettante may never devote extra proficiency slots to any nonweapon proficiency to improve that skill. She also may never devote more than five points (ten points at first level) per level to any single thief skill. Dilettantes receive a -2 penalty to reaction rolls from any serious artist or scholar, as these individuals are annoyed with the superficial dabbling of the Dilettante.

Diplomat

Description: Being from two distinct cultures and having to walk the line between them, half-elves make excellent diplomats. Although a half-elf of any class may learn the arts of diplomacy, only a Fighter/Mage/Thief is eligible for this kit, for they alone have the well-rounded abilities suited to this profession.

Requirements: A Diplomat needs a Strength and Dexterity of 9 or greater, an Intelligence of 12 or higher, and a Charisma of 14 or greater. Unlike most thieves, they may be of any alignment.

Role: A half-elf Diplomat's job is to moderate disputes and attempt to keep peace between two nations (usually either human or elven). They learn many skills to aid them in their career. In their party, the Diplomat will be the individual to call upon to parley with monsters. The other skills make her just as valuable an asset when negotiations fail.

Secondary skills: Scribe.

Weapon proficiencies: The Diplomat should be proficient with at least one small, easily concealable weapon (dagger, knife, hand crossbow, etc.). Diplomats may not specialize in weapon use.

Nonweapon proficiencies: Required: The Diplomat must purchase at least two extra Modern Languages. *Bonus:* Etiquette, Local History. *Recommended:* Fast Talking, Heraldry, Ancient History, Reading/Writing.

Equipment: Although no special equipment is required of a Diplomat, heavy arms and armor tend to make one look more threatening than is preferred in such a profession.

Special benefits: Due to his dealings with them, a Diplomat has a +4 bonus to reaction rolls for leaders or politicians of any other race. Diplomats occasionally may be offered "diplomatic immunity" for crimes, but this will depend on the country of operation, and possibly the crime in question.

Special hindrances: Diplomats do not operate with as much freedom as other characters. They are still in the employ of and are answerable to their king or queen. Further, if the Diplomat character does offend a foreign nation, the king or queen will hasten to discipline the character to keep peace.

Conclusion

These kits should help the half-elves in your campaign expand their identities, but this list is by no means complete. DMs are encouraged to modify these kits to suit the campaign or invent new kits. Half-elves from the DARK SUN® setting of Athas, or the dark domains of the RAVENLOFT® campaign could be radically different than those of most AD&D games. Players and DMs alike always should be considering options to make the games more fun for everyone.

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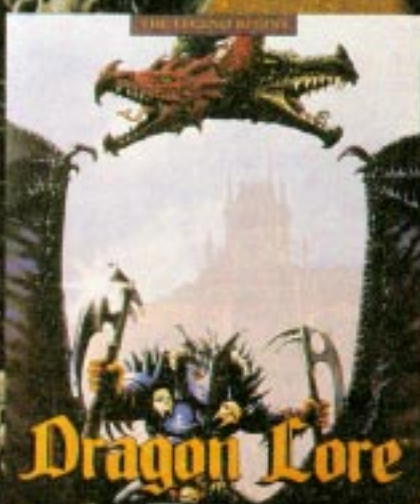
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as the preliminar... been playing, there... question that it will... he most talked-about...

Dr... son... This... oper... still c... story,



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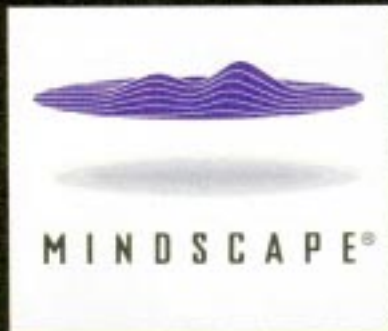


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BAZAAR of the BIZARRE

*"Magic. Often it means the difference between success and failure,
life and death. It is a marvelous, mysterious force,
a source of awe and fear.*

*Of all the myriad
creatures that
walk the earth,
few understand
magic as well as
the elves."*

*Azurel Eriedor,
elven mage*



Arcane elven artifacts

Because of their longevity, elves have the opportunity to explore the realm of magic far beyond the research of others. True, a human mage may achieve more magical might than his elven counterpart, but as the elven saying goes, "Perfection is the greatest power." Indeed, an experienced elven mage may have a much more comprehensive understanding of magic than a human mage considerably more powerful.

Elves, as a race, are entranced by the arcane arts. Having been created, according to legend, from the blood of a god, elves have a natural affinity toward magic. Over a span of many generations, they have learned how to mold their magical powers to best suit their needs. As a result, numerous magical items have been created that are distinctly elven in nature and purpose. For the most part, elves jealously guard them from the other races. The following magical items, which are only a few among many elven creations, are found almost exclusively in the possession of elves.

Arrow of entrapment

This plain-seeming arrow has a magical +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. In addition, any target up to the size of a hill giant hit by the *arrow of entrapment* is wrapped in a thick mass of sticky webbing that prevents or, for larger creatures, restricts movement. If a target is hit by the arrow, the webbing is unavoidable. Medium-sized or smaller creatures are rendered immobile by the mass of webs for one turn, while larger creatures have their movement rates reduced to one-third of normal. Every point of Strength over 15 possessed by the trapped individual lessens the entrapment by one round. Flames of any kind will burn away the webbing in one round, but the entrapped creature will suffer 2d6 points of fire damage in the

If the *arrow of entrapment* does not contact a creature in its flight, it creates a mass of web at the point of impact, equal

to a wizard's web spell cast at 6th-level ability.

The *arrow* breaks upon impact and cannot be reused.

XP value: 250

Bow +1, enchanter

This finely crafted bow confers a +1 bonus to attack and damage upon arrows fired from it. Unlike other magical bows, the *enchanter* imbues the arrow itself with the +1 bonus the moment it leaves for its target. Thus, a normal arrow fired from the *enchanter* could hit a monster invulnerable to normal weapons (e.g.: a mummy). Once the arrow has ended its flight, it loses its enchantment.

XP value: 900

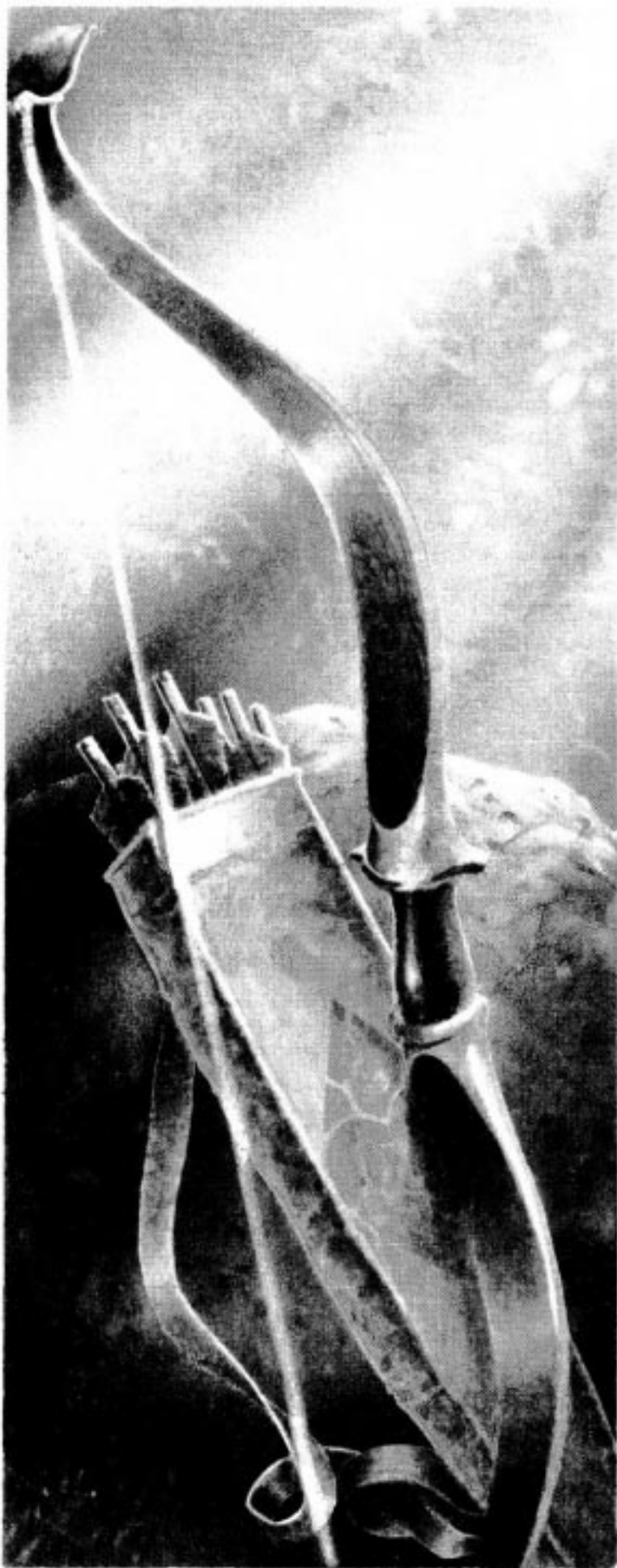
Bow +2, ironheart

This bow is particularly prized by elven rangers. It grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls upon arrows fired from it. In addition, the *ironheart* can, at the wielder's mental command, quickly change into a +2 melee weapon. Generally, a long bow becomes a long sword and a short bow becomes a short sword. There are a few *ironhearts* that become magical broad swords or scimitars, but such instances are rare. There is no limit to the number of times the *ironheart* may change shape. If it is broken in either form, the item's magic is lost.

XP value: 2,000

Bracelet of mental contact

This plain gold bracelet allows its wearer and any other people designated by the wearer, up to 10 individuals, to communicate via telepathy. The telepathic link can be maintained over a distance of 100 yards between individuals, allowing communication of thoughts and emotions but not mental images. By passing telepathic messages down a line of linked individuals, a person at one end can communicate a message to a person beyond 100 yards away, so long as the individuals forming the link



are within 100 yards of the next person.

Receiving a telepathic communication in no way disrupts a person's actions such as spell-casting, but sending a message requires a full round of unbroken concentration. If the sender's concentration is broken, the telepathic message does not reach others in the link.

The bracelet has a maximum of 50 charges. Each individual in the link uses up one charge when the bracelet is activated. The telepathic link remains for up to one hour. Other individuals may join the link after it has been set up, provided there are no more than 10 members in the link. When one of the linked individuals dies or falls unconscious, all other members of the link are aware of the break in contact, and can identify which person broke the contact. Contact cannot be broken voluntarily, except by spells or devices that shield thoughts. The bracelet can be recharged with the wizard spell sending.

XP value: 2,500

Harp of courage

When this beautifully crafted harp is played and a command word spoken, a wave of courage passes through all creatures friendly to the person playing the harp, in a 100' radius sphere from it. The wave of courage increases the fighting ability of those affected, granting them a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. It also heightens the listeners' defensive awareness, resulting in a +1 bonus to armor class and saving throws. The effect remains as long as the harp is played.

Any enemies in the 100' radius are affected by a wave of despair that inhibits their fighting potential and causes a -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls, armor class, and saving throws. Creatures of ten or more hit dice are unaffected by the despair.

The magic of the harp *of courage* may be invoked once per day, for a maximum duration of two turns per use. Note that for the magic to affect a creature, it must be able to hear the harp's music.

XP value: 3,000

Lock of security

This plain-seeming lock is often used to ensure the safety of precious elven artifacts or tomes from thieves and accidents. When the lock is clasped on a chest no larger than 30 cubic feet and the key is removed, an invisible barrier of magical force surrounds the chest, as well as all of the lock except the keyhole. The barrier protects the chest from fire, impact, and all other sorts of damage. The only way to open the chest is by removing the lock. Attempting to pick or otherwise tamper with the lock sends a shock of magical energy to the person responsible, causing 3d8 points of electrical damage. The only way to unlock the *lock of security* is with its key, a *limited* wish or a wish spell. Consequently, owners of a *lock of security*

guard the matching key very carefully.

XP value: 4,000

Manual of nature's harmony

This very rare tome is highly prized by rangers. Scribed in natural inks and bound in raw leather, it contains instructions for a series of mental and physical exercises that together serve to heighten a ranger's abilities and his link with nature. Any ranger who reads the tome and spends one month alone in the wilderness practicing the exercises goes up to the midpoint of the next higher level. The *manual* disappears after being read, but knowledge of the proper exercises remains for one-half year. This information cannot be recorded or related in any way.

Although the magic of the *manual* benefits any ranger, it is almost unheard of for these books to be found outside elven circles. With their natural affinity toward nature, elves treasure this book even if they are not rangers. In fact, any elf may read the manual without ill effect. Wizards, priests, or thieves of other races lose 10,000 to 60,000 (1d6 X 10,000) experience points after scanning the tome. Other classes who read the *manual* lose 1,000 to 6,000 experience points.

XP value: 8,000

Pendant of augmentation

This very powerful item is usable only by an elven wizard or priest. Typically, the pendant is a silver disc inscribed with an oak tree or some other nature symbol. By concentrating on the magical energies of the *pendant*, an elven priest or wizard draws strength from his surroundings to augment his own magical powers to their fullest potential. The first spell cast by the priest or wizard after activation of the *pendant* always has maximum possible duration, damage, and effect. For example, a *cure critical wounds* spell would automatically restore 27 hit points, and a *fireball* cast by a 5th-level wizard would inflict 30 points of damage (saving throws still apply). Furthermore, the spell is always successfully cast. The wizard or priest's concentration is absolute for this casting, and an attack on his person does not prevent it from taking effect (unless the spell-caster dies or is knocked unconscious before completing the casting). The *pendant* may be used twice per day.

XP value: 4,000

Pendants of Azurel

Developed by the great elven mage Azurel, these *pendants* have saved many an elf from a hopeless situation. These small circular discs, usually found singly, do not display any magical effects until they are attuned to a specific pair of people. This involves dabbing a pair of the discs with each person's blood under a full moon.

Once attuned, the *pendants* are worn by the pair. If one of the wearers falls unconscious, dies, loses control of mental or



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physical faculties, or utters the other wearer's name while holding the *pendant*, a distress call is sent to the wearer of the other *pendant*. The receiving person gains a clear understanding of the other's situation, as well as an exact view of the distressed person's location. This allows the person receiving the distress call to move unerringly in the other person's direction, regardless of the distance separating the two, and also follows for teleportation magic to work with no chance of error. The *pendants* do not function if not on the same plane of existence.

XP value: 1,000

Potion of resistance

Imbibing this potion spreads warm healing magic throughout an individual's body, curing it of any magical and non-magical diseases that affect either the body or the mind, excluding lycanthropy. Furthermore, the imbiber is immune to such diseases and cannot contract them for a full day. The entire potion must be quaffed in order for its magic to take effect.

XP value: 1,500

Ring of cooshee summoning

Activating this ring, which only functions outdoors in natural surroundings, sends out a beacon to any of the large elven hounds known as cooshee within a five-mile radius. Summoned cooshee arrive in one turn. The chance of successfully summoning a cooshee depends on the terrain:

Heavy growth	90%
Light growth	70%
Open fields	40%
Rocky terrain	20%

If the summons was successful, one to six cooshee will respond. They remain with the summoner, who can control them with telepathic commands, for one hour before returning to where they originated. The ring's power may be invoked once each day.

Cooshee: Int: Semi-(4); AL N(G); AC 5; MV 18, sprint 24; HD 3+3; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-4/1-4/2-8; SA overbearing; SD camouflage; MR nil; SZ M (4'); ML Steady (12); XP 270.

XP value: 1,200

Sword +2, orcslayer

This melee weapon always offers a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. Against orcs and orc-kin (orogs, half-orcs, etc.), the full powers of the *orcslayer* become apparent. Wielded against any of these creatures, its magical bonus increases to +3. Furthermore, and much more devastating, the sword confers two extra attacks with the weapon at the end of each melee round, which may or may not be used against the same opponent.

The *orcslayer* automatically glows soft blue when it approaches within twenty

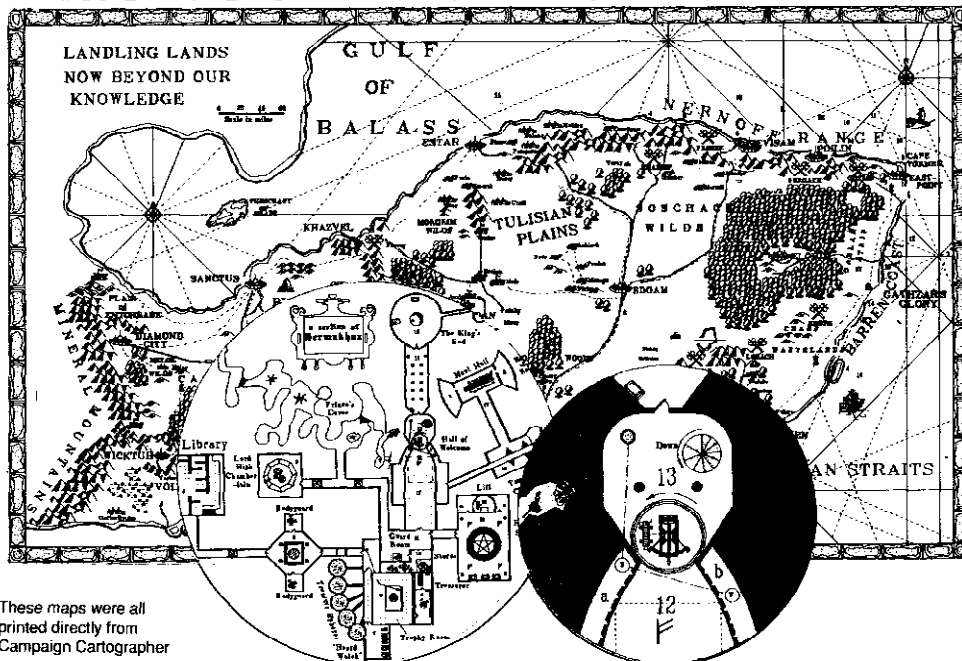
yards of an orc or orc-kin, thus alerting the wielder to its presence and eliminating the chance of the wielder's being surprised by the orcs. The glow is not bright, and is easily concealed by a normal sheath.

XP value: 2,000

Q



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The Dragon's Bestiary

Add these little guys to your campaign's elven forests

by Norman Abrahamsen

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

The Kercpa

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Temperate forests

FREQUENCY: Rare

ORGANIZATION: Tribe

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day

DIET: Herbivore

INTELLIGENCE: Average to High (8-14)

TREASURE TYPE: Nil

ALIGNMENT: Neutral to Chaotic Good

NO. APPEARING: 3-12

ARMOR CLASS: 3

MOVEMENT: 9, Cl 15

HIT DICE: 1

THAC0: 19

NO. OF ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE/ATTACKS: 1d3

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Surprise, +4 on attacks with bows

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Surprised only on 1, dodge missiles, saves as 7 HD creature

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: T (1'~1½')

MORALE: Steady (12); with elves, Elite (14)

XP VALUE: 65

2 HD Defender: 120

3 HD Defender: 175

4 HD Defender: 270

Shaman, level 1-4: 175

Shaman, level 5: 270

Wizard: + 1 HD



The Kercpa (both singular and plural) are a reclusive race inhabiting dense forests, far from civilization. Shy of most races other than elves, and exceptionally skilled at remaining undetected, they are rarely seen even when their dwellings are nearby.

Seldom exceeding 1½' in height, kercpa appear as bipedal red squirrels, complete with bushy tails to assist in keeping their balance. Eyes are usually green or hazel, although blue is not known. They favor garb similar to that of the elves who usually reside near to, colored so as to enable them to blend in more easily into their surroundings. Hands and feet are never covered, however, as that would impede their ability to climb. Among the trees they are as nimble and acrobatic as normal squirrels, running and leaping from branch to branch and tree to tree with astonishing ease and grace.

Kercpa speak their own language. In addition, many have learned one or more languages of other forest-dwelling races such as sylvan or wild elves, treants, pixies, and sprites. About one in ten will have picked up at least a smattering of the Common tongue.

Combat: Kercpa are peaceful by nature and always avoid combat when possible. However, should it become necessary, they are quite capable of defending themselves, their homes, and those of their elven allies with an efficiency that belies their diminutive size and rather harmless appearance. The squirrel-folk move with great stealth through the woodland, imposing a -5 penalty on others' surprise rolls. Due to their keen senses, they are themselves surprised only on a roll of 1. Hiding motionlessly in any forest terrain, kercpa are 90% unlikely to be seen. They make all saving throws as 7 Hit Dice creatures, adjusted, where applicable, as if possessing a Dexterity score of 19. Although they never wear armor of any kind, their size and phenomenal agility combine to give them an excellent armor class. A kercpa, furthermore, may attempt to dodge any missile directed at it, provided that it is in a position to see the attack launched. A successful saving throw versus death magic (modified by Dexterity, as above) the kercpa successfully dodged the attack, regardless of whether the attack would normally have hit. Up to two missiles may be dodged per round by each kercpa.

If forced into melee, kercpa wield tiny swords or spears that inflict 1d3 points of damage. However, well aware of the disadvantage they suffer against most foes, they strive to avoid hand-to-hand combat. The preferred weapon of any kercpa is a bow. Although the seemingly toy-like kercpa bow has but half the range and damage causing potential of a normal short bow, an innate skill honed by intense training make them formidable weapons in the squirrel-folk's hands nonetheless. Some

kercpa routinely best their elven allies in short-range archery contests.

A kercpa may fire up to three arrows per round, with each such attack at +4 to hit. A typical kercpa strategy is to take to the trees, surround the enemy, and while darting in and out of concealment, rain down a relentless barrage of stinging projectiles from all sides. It is not uncommon for a band of orcs, gnolls, or other forest marauders thus assaulted to believe themselves under attack by scores of the creatures, when in reality they are faced with only a dozen or so. Certainly the kercpa do their best to encourage this mistaken impression.

Should their opponents be too numerous to drive away or destroy in this manner, the kercpa shift tactics and attempt to lead them out of their territory, goading them to the chase with taunts and jeers if the squirrel-folks' enemies prove reluctant to pursue them. By this the kercpa hope to fragment a larger band, get them hopelessly separated and lost in the woods, and then deal with the more manageably sized groups one at a time. Some tribes, especially those dwelling in or near enemy-infested lands, will attempt to lead pursuers through an area of forest that, in preparation for such a contingency, the kercpa had rigged with concealed pits, snares, deadfalls, and other traps. When such tactics fail, the kercpa send runners off through the trees to alert the elven settlements the squirrel-folk seldom live far from.

Kercpa are able to communicate over distances of up to 100 yards by utilizing a simple language of whistles and bird calls. While limited in its range of expression, this method of communication is sufficient for them to coordinate or alter tactics without the need to regroup, an invaluable advantage in combat relying on cunning, stealth, subterfuge, and deception. Throughout the kercpa territory will be stashed caches of arrows and other supplies (in hollow branches, etc.), eliminating the need to return to the village to restock. All adults are intimately familiar with the areas in which they live and, except in certain unusual instances (such as quarry empowered with flight or utilizing a *pass without trace* spell) can track intruders as a ranger throughout.

Those kercpa with spell-casting ability (see below) employ magic in combat to complement and enhance the squirrel-folks combat tactics. Favorites include *ventriloquism*, *taunt*, *wall of fog*, and *mirror image*.

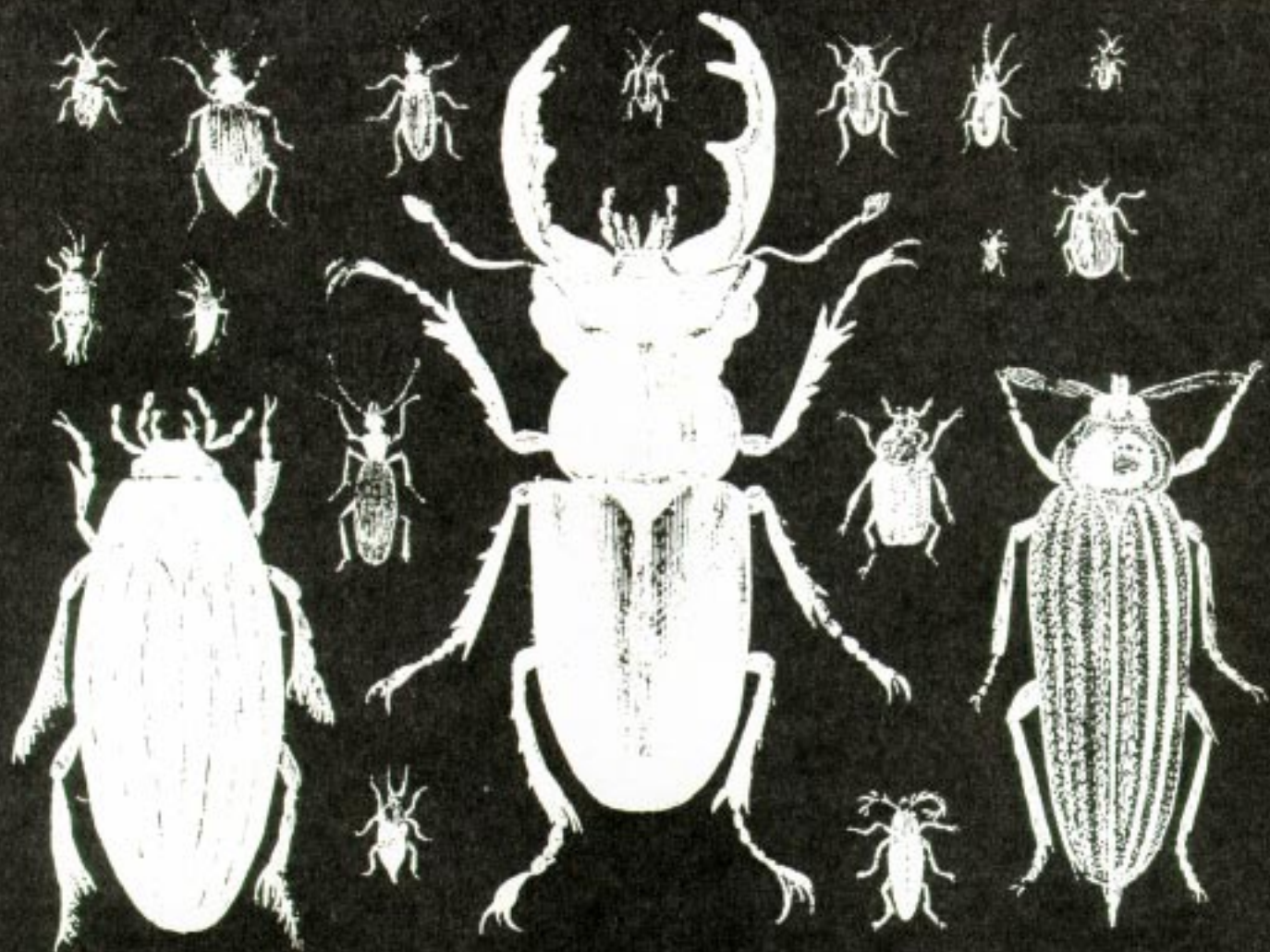
Habitat/Society: A typical kercpa tribe consists of 100-300 adult squirrel-folk, with an additional number of young equal to roughly 20% of the population. Male and female kercpa are equally skilled fighters, while the young are noncombatants. One in every 20 kercpa will be an individual with 2 Hit Dice. For every 100

in a community, there will be an additional leader with 3 or 4 Hit Dice. As the most skilled warriors in the village, these exceptional individuals (or "defenders" as they are known) are primarily responsible for its safe-keeping from malevolent outside forces. Their duties include the organizing of patrols, the maintenance the village's defenses, and leading the tribe in attack, retreat, and, if necessary, evacuation. Kercpa defenders take this role very seriously and will not hesitate to sacrifice themselves for the tribe if the situation warrants. A defender's THAC0 and saving throws are proportionately superior to others of their kind. A 3 HD kercpa, for example, would have a base THAC0 of 18 (14 with a bow) and make saving throws as a 9 Hit Die creature. Through trade with elves and sprites, kercpa sometimes manage to acquire a limited supply of their sleep-inducing arrows; any defender has a 25% chance to carry 1d4 of them in his quiver. These precious arrows will not be wasted on opponents the squirrel-folk believe can be overcome by other means.

All kercpa tribes will be led by a shaman of the 4th or 5th level of ability. For every 50 kercpa in the tribe, there will be an additional 1d2 lesser shamans of 1st through 3rd level. Shamans receive an additional 1d4 hit points for each level they possess beyond the first, and for every two levels fight as if having one additional Hit Die. They may cast spells from the following spheres: All, Animal, Creation, Divination, Healing, Plant, Sun, and Weather. In addition, kercpa shamans are skilled herbalists with the ability to concoct effect remedies to numerous ailments and afflictions. Among these is a minor variety of healing potion that restores 1d4+1 hit points to the imbiber. Any kercpa venturing outside the village is 75% likely to have such a potion in her possession. Kercpa shamans are responsible for preserving the tribe's health, providing advice and spiritual guidance, and presiding over ceremonies. In theory, the shamans also are responsible for governing all internal matters within the tribe, but in actuality there is little need. Kercpa seem to be by nature cooperative, working together for the common good of the forest community. Internal or inter-tribal strife among them is unknown.

The role of the defenders usually falls to the male kercpa, while the females comprise the majority of the shamans. This tendency is by no means a rule, however, and exceptions either way are not uncommon. The sexes in kercpa society are in all ways equal (as well as being difficult for outsiders to tell apart). They marry for life and mates are fiercely protective of their young and of each other.

Perhaps due to their close relationship with elves, some kercpa dabble in magic; any adult has a 5% chance of being able to cast spells as a wizard of the 1st to 4th level. Kercpa rarely learn spells of an



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offensive nature, and never those involving fire.

Kercpa villages consist of numerous small buildings situated high among the branches, and are usually spread out among several trees. An elaborate high-way of vine ladders and bridges connect the various buildings. The village is difficult to see from the ground; even observant outsiders have but a 5% chance of noticing it. Actively scanning the trees increases the chance to 10%. Villages set among deciduous trees are more easily spied in the winter-time, increasing the probabilities to 15% and 50% respectively. Under normal circumstances, the kercpa's vigilant scout patrols and sentries make it impossible for an intruder to come within a mile of one of their dwellings without their knowledge.

The squirrel-folk live by foraging. Dozens of small bands strike out daily from early spring to late fall to gather food, water, and other necessities. Surplus is stored away for the winter. Unlike true squirrels, kercpa do not hibernate. They do, however, tend to be less active during the winter months, and often sleep for much greater lengths of time. At least a third of the tribe will remain active at all times in the event of a threat. Kercpa are strictly vegetarian so, despite considerable archery skill, their bows are not used for hunting. Foraging expeditions rarely take them more than 10 miles from the village. If a tribe becomes too large to be supported by the immediate area a group consisting mainly of younger couples breaks off to found a new village elsewhere. Tribes within the same region often converge on an annual basis (usually on the summer solstice) for a great festival. These celebrations, sometimes lasting several days, serve as an opportunity for various tribes to renew familial ties, hold council on matters of mutual concern, introduce young adults to possible mates, and to exchange goods and information. Music, song, dance, story-telling, friendly contests of archery, tumbling and speed, as well as an over-abundance of food and blackberry wine round out the festive nature of the gathering.

The simple kercpa religion pays homage to a single deity, a nameless earth goddess who, while said to be able to take any form in nature, is usually depicted as a vast oak tree. Religious ceremonies are few compared to those of most other races, and pious obligations are fulfilled simply by living in harmonious accord with nature. Faced with an ethical dilemma, kercpa seek a precedent in the fables of Rititisk the Clever—the mythical patriarch of the race—and try to emulate his example. In addition to being entertaining stories of adventure in their own right—tales of Rititisk thwarting monstrous evil spiders, outwitting oafish giants (humans), questing to the ends of the earth for enchanted ever-striking arrows and the

like—the fables are believed by the kercpa to contain lessons to guide them through all aspects of life. They are essential to every young kercpa's education.

Strangers traveling through kercpa lands will be trailed and their actions scrutinized (ideally without the kercpa revealing their presence) but will be allowed to pass unhindered if they do not cause harm to the forest. This remains the case even with obviously evil creatures such as orcs and goblins. The only exceptions to the kercpa's reclusiveness include certain sylvan neighbors who share an interest in preserving the woodland. With

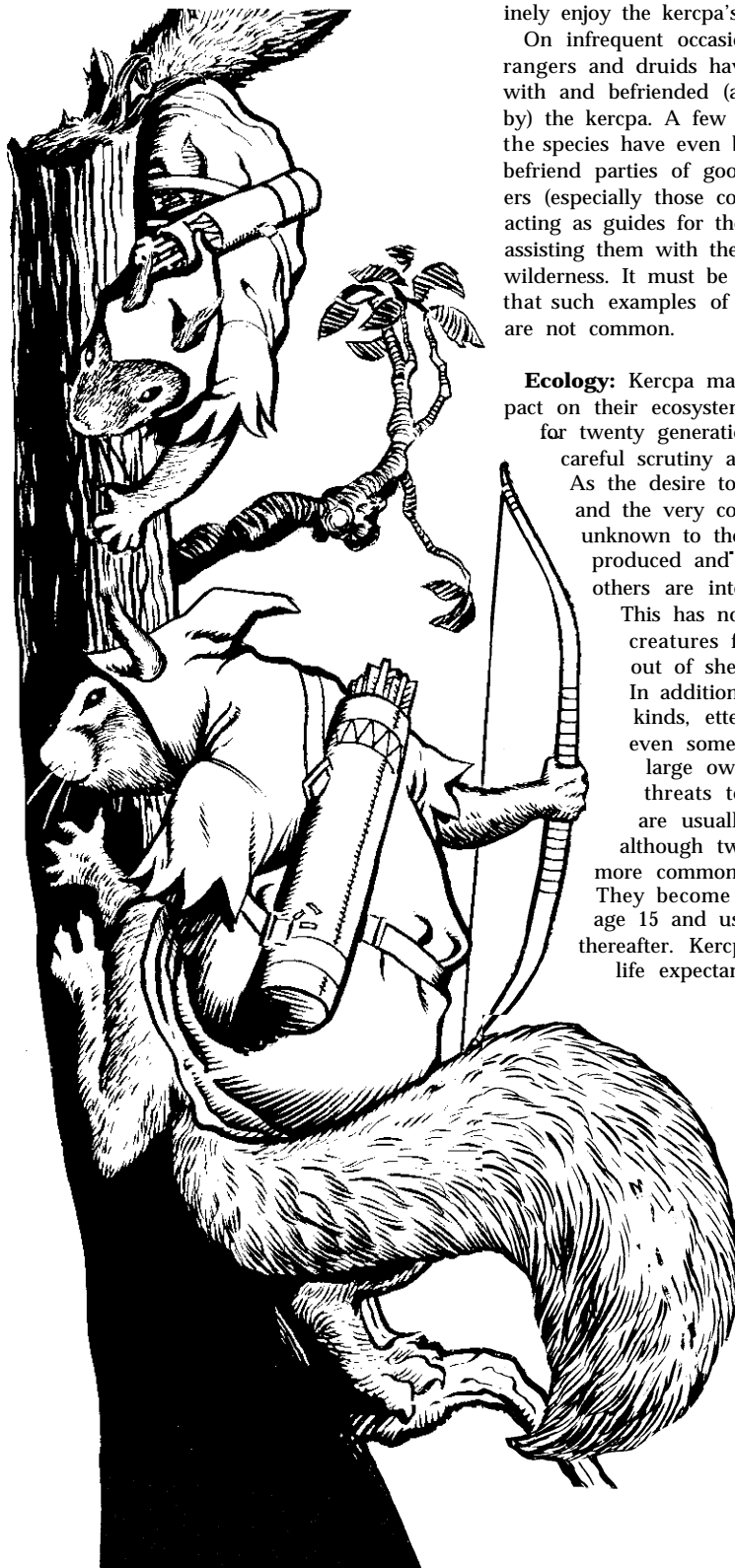
elves, sprites, and treants do the kercpa have ties of friendship and alliance. To the elves the kercpa are indispensable, as the squirrel-folk convey messages back and forth between camps, run errands for them, and keep them up to date on the latest happenings of the greater forest. In exchange, elves serve at times as guardians and mentors for the squirrel-folk's children. Young kercpa delight in the company of these elegant, graceful beings, running amok through their homes and pestering their long-lived friends with endless questions and requests for tales of "olden times." Most elves seem to genuinely enjoy the kercpa's company as well.


On infrequent occasions, some human rangers and druids have made contact with and befriended (and were befriended by) the kercpa. A few bolder members of the species have even been known to befriend parties of good-aligned adventurers (especially those containing elves), acting as guides for them and otherwise assisting them with their knowledge of the wilderness. It must be noted, however, that such examples of eccentric behavior are not common.

Ecology: Kercpa make negligible impact on their ecosystem; forests inhabited for twenty generations appear even to careful scrutiny as virgin woodland. As the desire to accumulate wealth and the very concept of money are unknown to them, the kercpa have produced and amassed little that others are interested in acquiring.

This has not prevented evil creatures from hunting them out of sheer malice, however. In addition, giant spiders of all kinds, ettercaps, stirges, and even some raptors (such as large owls) are frequent threats to them. Kercpa are usually born singularly, although twins and triplets are more common than with humans. They become mature at about age 15 and usually marry soon thereafter. Kercpa have an average life expectancy of 60 years.

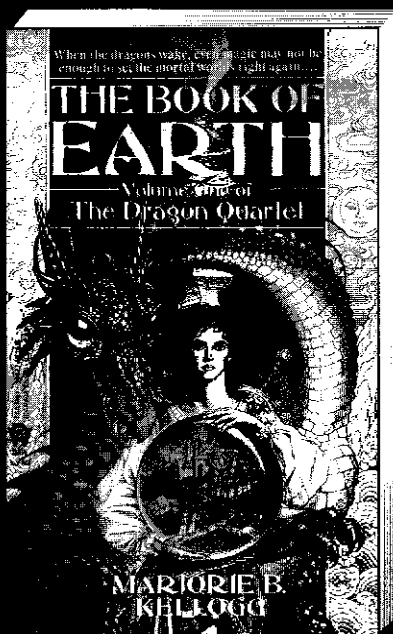
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For TRUTH and JUSTICE

by Chris Avellone

An adventure checklist for

The players are assembled. They are sitting across from you, their brows dripping with perspiration as they wait for you to draw the curtain back from the adventure's opening scene and allow their heroes, powers blazing and muscles flexing, to burst on your unsuspecting adventure and carry it dragging and screaming into the depths of defeat. They've been waiting all week, dealing with routine school, home, and office work, and now they want *action*. The kind of action only a hard-working GM can provide.

But you've got that nagging feeling in the back of your mind—something's missing.

And you have no idea what it is. You've planned for every contingency, for every player foul-up, for every radical direction the characters may take. Still, you worry. Unless you remember halfway through the adventure what it is you've forgotten, you'll be slapping your head in frustration as the players find the weak chink in your adventure and crack it open like a rusty suit of power armor.

That's where the "adventure checklist" comes in; it can help a GM answer the question, "Have I forgotten anything?" before an adventure begins and includes tips for smoothing the flow of gameplay in a superhero campaign. It also gives suggestions for improving the quality of adventure design, dealing with game mechanics, combat, and adding to the "feel" of a superhero adventure.

Before the game

These suggestions may help a GM who's suffering from "GM's block" to find a direction for the adventure. For GMs who already have an adventure plot in mind, these suggestions should help improve the adventure by making it more character-intensive.

Character consideration— The history and psychology of a PC can design an adventure for the GM; arch-enemies, dependents, and personal problems can become the core of several evenings of enjoyable gameplay. Before constructing an adventure, the GM should take a moment to analyze each character and her potential role in the adventure. The more character-specific an adventure is, the more players will enjoy it; it lets them know the GM is taking an interest in their character backgrounds and personalities.

As such, it should never be considered a sign of weakness to question a player on what type of role-playing situations the player wants to be involved in and work it into the adventure; the GM should provide the players with events and NPCs that allow them to develop their heroes and flex their psychological limitations and personal codes (some players never let on what their characters would like to do and doom themselves to a silent desperation). Some characters want romance, others want to do heavy research and investigation, and some just want to trash a lot of criminal scum.

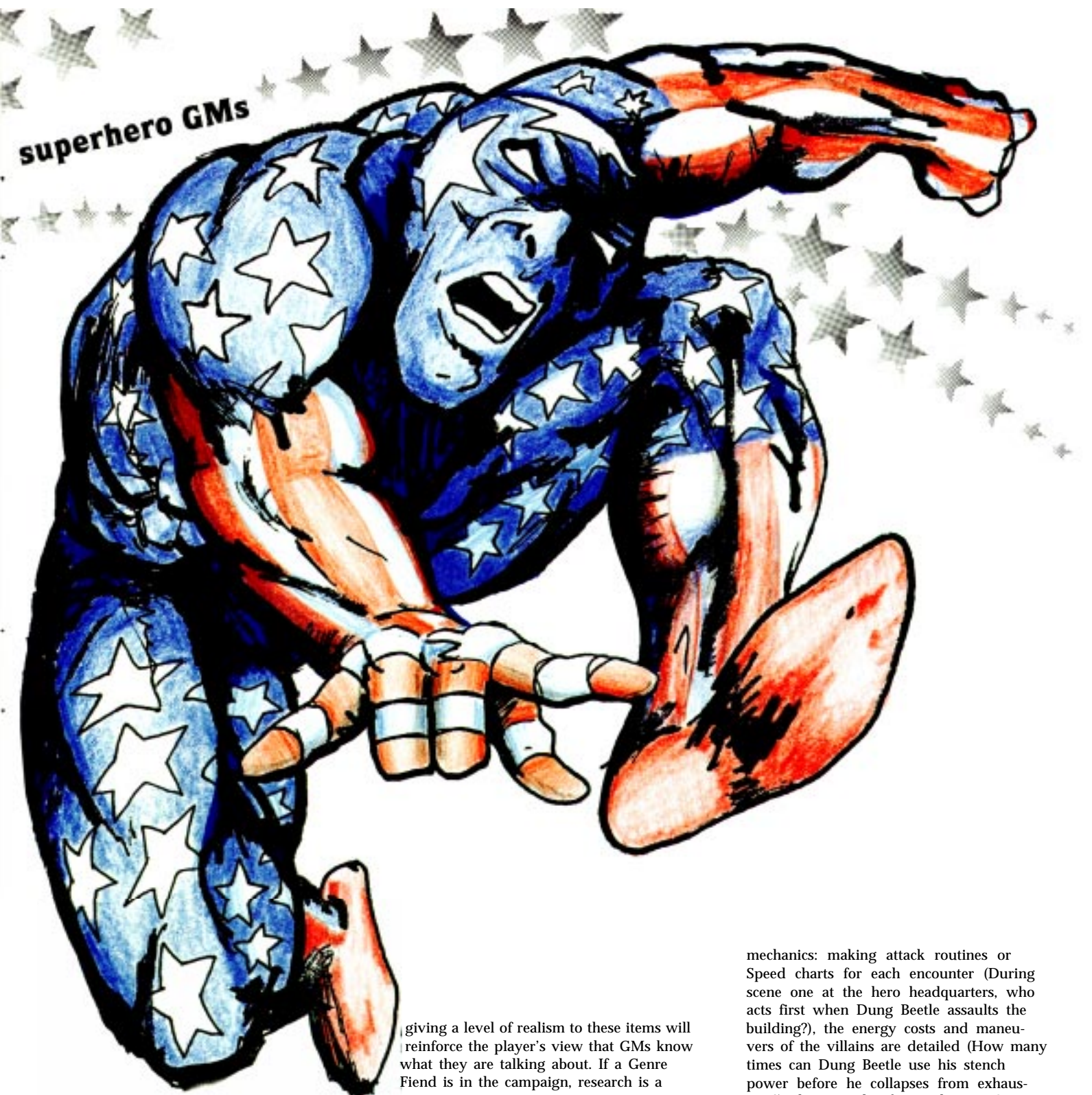
Before focusing on the adventure details and game mechanics such as villain design, the GM always should have an up-to-date copy of each hero; this allows GMs to look up character skills, powers, and characteristics that can be used in the adventure or against villains. Allowing seldom-used character skills and powers to unearth clues and pull the PCs through tight spots makes characters appreciate their powers more and gives each player the feeling her character is contributing to the adventure. The GM should consider rewarding characters who have "useless" skills (which they bought to round out their character concept), by including places to use them in the adventure. For example, the Artiste, a New York hero, has the Knowledge Skill: New York Arts Scene. While this is useless in battling the iron-clad villain Scraps, the GM could create an adventure where a villain uses a New York art exhibit to give the Artiste clues to his plans.

Villain consideration— How the villains act, the crimes they commit, and their relationships to the characters are important to the adventure. The thrust of superhero games is role-playing and combat; to do it well, villains should be as physically and psychologically developed as the PCs. In short, villains can serve three roles in an adventure: A.) as a physical threat (primarily a combat threat), B.) a social threat (concerned with affecting a character's social relationships in a manner detrimental to the character) or C.) as an aid to the characters (the Worm may not be a powerful villain, but he's always willing to let characters know what's going on in the campaign's criminal underground). These roles should effect the villains' abilities and skills (combat monsters should be designed for fighting, social threats should have skills and contacts, and villain aids should have streetwise or scientifically useful skills to help the characters).

Villains also should be designed with the characters—and the players—in mind. Some players can't stand to think that anyone is better at a skill or power than they are; other players enjoy good bouts with equal foes and pounding weaklings can get a little tiresome. Martial Artists may want to match opponents circle kick for circle kick, and may not be thrilled with fighting invulnerable energy projectors all the time.

If a villain has met a PC before, the GM may want to include references to the past combat within the adventure or during their next confrontation.

Research— Once an adventure plot has been roughed out (it doesn't have to be too complex—something as simple as a "street-level adventure with a lot of gang warfare" is sufficient to get started), some research may help give the GM a direction or improve the quality of the plot by injecting a level of realism into the adventure. Reading newspapers for contemporary issues, knowing jargon (especially street lingo), and technical details varies according to the



Artwork by Michael Scott

level of realism in a campaign, but having a grasp on the basics is important. If an evil business empire is attempting to financially undermine a PC's company, it might be worthwhile to research corporate warfare. Trial procedures, mythology, ethnic values, racial history, police procedures, and current articles on new technology (science magazines can provide realistic campaign items to introduce: new viruses, microchips, etc., as well as good pictures and handouts) can supplement a campaign;

giving a level of realism to these items will reinforce the player's view that GMs know what they are talking about. If a Genre Fiend is in the campaign, research is a must.

There is nothing wrong with ad-libbing, as long as it sounds convincing. If you don't have time to research every tourist spot or important street or park in a campaign city; just say an earthquake or supervillain attack has terraformed the city into what you want it to be like.

Busy work—Once a rough plot has been determined, the villains created, and the players have agreed to play, doing some busy work before the adventure takes place can improve the speed and the quality of the time spent role-playing. "Busy work" is essentially streamlining game

mechanics: making attack routines or Speed charts for each encounter (During scene one at the hero headquarters, who acts first when Dung Beetle assaults the building?), the energy costs and maneuvers of the villains are detailed (How many times can Dung Beetle use his stench power before he collapses from exhaustion?), the name list for random NPCs is ready ("Er . . . the police man you are talking to is...Billy...Billy Carter. Yeah."), wandering encounters are prepared ("As you are flying home from the crime you suddenly see . . .") and all necessary villain statistics are in order.

Villain descriptions and names can be irritating and can detract from the flow of play. Photocopying villain pictures, or drawing one's own, enables GM to "show" the villain without resorting to a verbal description, and if the villain's picture is labeled too, this prevents using canned dialogue in an obvious attempt to an-

nounce the villain's name. ("Ah . . . the Artiste. You are no doubt concerned about my appellation—reflect on this, fool, as you inhale my rancid stench—I am the insidious Dung Beetle!")

Busy work also involves researching the power limitations of the villains used in the adventure. If a villain is using his N-ray Extra-Dimensional Travel power, it is necessary to know the power's limitations and jot them down to prevent misuse or having to waste time looking it up during game play. Usually, the limits of the power can be taken in terms of the areas where the powers will be used in the adventure (i.e., if the power is being used on a city street, the environmental limitations will not be the same as if it were being used on the moon). Once again, having a copy of the PC sheets can help identify any problems or obvious uses of a villain's power (if one character has mental defenses, this obviously will effect how capable a mentalist villain will be in attacking them; if the villain needs to mind-control a character for the purposes of the plot, then the GM should consider raising his Mind Control level to compensate for any Mental Defense). The GM should be familiar with powers and rules to such an extent the players do not know more than the GM does; it lowers players' respect for the GM.

A list of NPC names with an identifiable trait so the PCs can remember them easily ("Ah, Billy Carter, the sniffing cop with hayfever!") comes in useful if the players decide they want to speak to every scientist, guard, and orderly in the laboratory before getting on with the rest of the adventure. In addition, having instant NPC names and traits ready will impress the players. Along the same lines, the use of specific street names helps set the location of the adventure ("The huge robot has just stepped on the Cameron-Leeds Industries building on 4th and Main. Any heroes in the area, please respond . . ."), and GMs might want to have a list of street names ready also.

Props—Lighting, music, costumes, and handouts can set the mood; dimming the lights during a horror adventure or playing a tape of an alarm sounding while the characters invade the base of an enemy organization can spice up the adventure. Costumes can help characters get into their personas (some role-playing parties may involve getting together in costume and consuming food their PCs like). The inclusion of supervillain files, case histories, medical records, FBI reports, news-casts, and building blueprints also give an authentic feel to the adventure.

The adventure

Now that the preliminaries are out of the way, the adventure itself becomes paramount. A rough plot should be percolating in the GM's mind, and attention to these specific areas of the adventure can help solidify the plot.

One word of warning: While a rough outline is good to have, the GM may want to avoid detailing an adventure more than one session in advance—character actions may force the adventure to take a radical turn ("Larry, you got to believe me, I had no idea that my stray blast would kill that cop!"), and by deciding how the adventure ends or trying to force the characters to follow a certain path can be frustrating for the GM and the players. In addition, resentment towards "the hand of fate" may build up in their minds.

Introduction—How does the adventure start? The GM may choose to write a narrative that leads the characters into a fight scene, or relate a news report of a mysterious event the characters decide to investigate. Where the adventure starts is important: a good exploration technique is to have the characters at their jobs or seeing NPCs at the start of the adventure, for they may not have time to do it once the energy blasts start flying. The introduction should avoid being choppy and disorganized, as it sets the pace for the rest of the adventure.

Flow of the adventure—This portion of development locates flow problems. The GM analyzes the plot to make sure the players can move smoothly from one scene to the next: they may be captured and taken to the villain's base, a clue leads them to the villain, a contact tips them off, etc. Psychological disadvantages can be used to aid these transitions; for example, the GM wants to lead the Artiste into a trap in order for him to be captured and taken to the villain's hideout. Knowing Artiste hates art critics, the GM lures him into the trap by using fugitive art critics as bait. Examining the flow of the adventure should be done partly to anticipate trouble spots in the adventure and create contingency plans if the PCs fail to find information vital to the continuation of the plot.

If character separation occurs in the adventure, try and work out a way for all players to participate or else boredom will set in while they are waiting their turn. One way to handle this problem is to provide the PCs with communicators or a mindlink that allows all of them to interact at once, no matter where the location is; thus, they can still offer advice and give suggestions to acting players even though they are not there.

As a final note, it is a bad idea to force the PCs to play the "waiting game" during an adventure (i.e., the heroes must wait and see what the villains will do); the players should be able to act and react at all times.

The end—The ending is as important as the introduction. Finishing the adventure cleanly and tying up loose ends with a smooth transition to the next adventure prevents anticlimactic endings. The end can foreshadow a coming threat, leaving the PCs with a desire to see what happens next time.

Plot devices

Outside of the basic plot, these adventure techniques focus on game mechanics and underhanded ploys that can help PCs become more involved in the plot. Use them at will.

Time limit—This is an effective tension builder. ("We have five minutes to find the bomb and defuse it before it explodes.") This technique forces the characters to act; if gameplay is bogging down because of arguing and stalling by the PCs, throwing a time limit in can clear up the role-playing congestion pretty quick.

Let 'em plan—This is a way of reducing the GM's burden of always having to keep the adventure moving. By having the PCs plan how to protect an installation targeted by a group of terrorists, or having them plan a danger room session for each other, leaves the GM free to do last minute touch-ups or compute important villain statistics.

Wearing 'em out—This technique throws three or four threats at the PCs at once. If a battle is going well for the PCs, this technique can turn the tables. Should they put out the blazing fire, rescue their trapped comrade, or stop the villain's getaway car? A number of minor threats occurring at once can be as challenging as confronting a major supervillain; the GM should force the PCs to think on their feet.

Battle zones

The set-up of a battle zone plays a big role in all superhero games. Clobbering Dung Beetle with the nearest lightpost or telephone pole may be the most important thing on a character's mind during a fight, and the GM should make sure every battle site is detailed enough to stage a brawl in.

Counters and miniatures—Counters and miniatures give a 3-D feel to the battle site. It also lets the GM and players know exactly where the villains, the threats, the agents, and teammates are at a glance. Cardboard counters can suffice for PCs and villains; for enemy agents, using numbered counters keeps track of them during the battle ("Agent 1, Agent 2," and so on). Trying to remember which agent was wounded during the last phase can be frustrating; if the character decides to "hit #2 again," however, the agent's statistics can be cross-referenced and his hit points deducted easily. If the agents are each using different weapons, numbering the counters eliminates weapon confusion.

If time permits, counters can be made for cars and movable objects. Having counters for throwable objects helps PCs interact with the battle field; in addition, counters for radius effect attacks, explosions, darkness fields, craters, crowds, and rubble add to the battle zone environment. (It also prevents heated arguments about whether an attack would have hit a character.)

Maps—A map, either a rough drawing or a detailed battle site, should be done for every battle scene in an adventure. Detailed maps, in the interests of time, might be made to simulate generic battle sites within the campaign: a city street map, a map of the hero's base, an alleyway, etc., are locales that can be used over and over again if necessary. It is always nice to do a detailed map of the battle that heralds the climax of the adventure.

If no detailed maps are available, scrap paper should be on hand for sketching rough maps. Rough maps are better than fighting blind, and as long as the players can judge distances, heights, and where common objects are located, a map is doing its job.

Anticipating the needs of players when making a map is necessary; knowing whether Artiste can jump from building to building will be important to the character concerned if he will be chasing a villain across rooftops. Heroes with earthquake powers will want to know information about how strong the nearby foundations of buildings are, water controllers may want to know where the water mains are beneath the street, PCs may want to know where the nearest fire hydrant or fountain is if they are fighting the Flaming Fear, etc.

If the GM wants the villains to escape, the battle site should be designed with an

escape route they can employ and the heroes can't (water-breathing villains diving into the river, stealth characters vanishing into the darkness of alleys or sewers, or shapeshifters running into a crowd of people).

Battle events—Events may occur during combat that force PCs to rescue civilians, put out fires, or deal with the police as they arrive on the scene. These events should have counters and details already worked out before the battle begins (such as making a note that "the gas station will explode in a fiery inferno one minute after the characters arrive, in a 10' radius doing the following damage . . ." and preparing a counter for its radius attack). The National Guard may show up, kids may rush into the middle of a combat scene, reporters may place themselves in danger to get prime footage, crowds may gather as the Flaming Fear begins to use radius-effect explosions, etc.

Villains and heroes should be allowed to manipulate the battle field for dramatic effect. A water elemental could cause a 20-story tidal wave to strike a beach, or a weather-controlling villain in the Arctic could immerse the heroes in a mile-long ice storm, far beyond his normal abilities. If the same leeway is given to the characters, it can simulate "mystery powers." The Artiste may know exactly where to pull on a stage curtain to have it collapse on the

Dung Beetle. Mr. Wizard, with his technical expertise, might be able to seize control of a building's computerized defense systems and turn them against foes. PCs appreciate these touches as long as they do not tip the battle in a villain's favor (though that is fun for the GM once in a while).

Villain statistics—Writing down a villain's combat statistics (especially energy, chances to hit, and hit points) on a scrap sheet of paper and keeping a running check through the battle speeds play, and making a Speed chart of all heroes and villains involved for each combat removes the confusion of deciding who acts first.

Conclusion

These points and suggestions are intended to improve adventure design, speed play, and improve the quality of the game. Next time your players lash out at your adventure, you can fend off their actions with military precision and even make a quick response that leaves them scrambling to come up with contingency plans, all the while leaning back in your chair as their desperate pleas and mad gambles fill the air. As you sip your soda, you can reflect on your new freedom from that nagging feeling which distracted you from the demanding work of being a superhero game GM.

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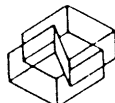
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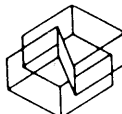


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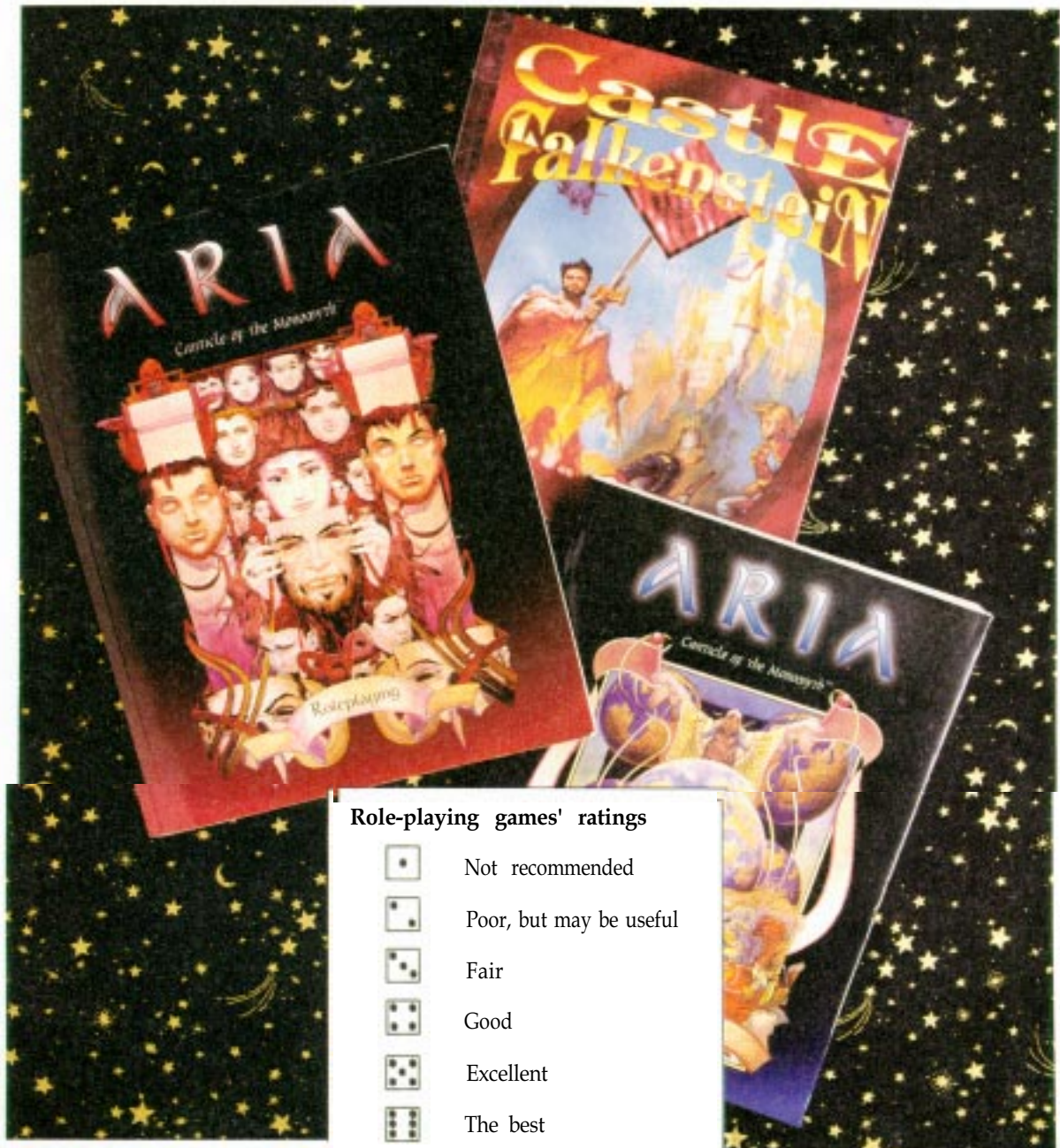
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ROLE-PLAYING *reviews*

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When dungeons won't do; Alternative fantasy RPGs



Don't mention this to TSR, Inc., but there's more to fantasy role-playing than the AD&D® game. I'm not just talking about FASA's EARTHDAWN*, Avalon Hill's RUNEQUEST*, WotC's ARS MAGICA*, and I.C.E.'s LORD OF THE RINGS* games; though solid efforts, none of them strays too far from genre traditions. Nor am I referring to old-timers such as the ROLE-MASTER* and CHIVALRY & SORCERY* games, nice tries suffering from too many rules. And I'm certainly not referring to the myriad of AD&D game wanna-bes, unmemorable clones—make that unbearable clones—too numerous to list.

Nope, I'm talking about the weird stuff, the outrageous stuff, the bend-over-backward, try-anything efforts like the TALISLANTA* game, which replaces elves and dwarves with Sunra Aquamancers and Zandir Charlatans. Such as Phage Press' AMBER* game, a remarkable experiment in diceless mechanics. Like White Wolf's MAGE: THE ASCENSION* game, where misfit magicians struggle to survive in an urban nightmare. Not only do games such as these provide relief when we've overdosed on dragons and magic wands, they jar us out of our ruts, reminding us that there's more to fantasy than J.R.R. Tolkien. Here are two new rut-jarriers, guaranteed to make you reconsider the way you look at RPGs.

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Editing: Kirsten Kaschock

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Cover: Michael William Kaluta



ARIA Worlds Book

304-page softcover book
Last Unicorn Games

\$26

Design: Christian Scott Moore with Owen M. Seyler

Additional design: William Ellery Samuels and Marc Radle

Editing: Kirsten Kaschock and Jesse Fure

Illustrations: Janet Aulisio, Paul Daly, Liz Danforth, Darrell Midgette, William O'Conner, Jeff Parker, Mark Poole, Marc Radle, Mark Ryberg, William Ellery Samuels, Oscar Stern, Ruth Thompson, Karl Waller, and Tim Wilson

Cover: Michael William Kaluta



It was a more significant skirmish than Celebrity Week on *Jeopardy*. These two hefty volumes, as fat as the Des Moines phone book, provide guidelines for designing every element of a fantasy RPG from scratch: races, settings, magic rules, religious systems, you name it. You say you're sick of stock PCs, like warriors, thieves, and wizards? The ARIA rules allow players to assume the roles of entire societies—we're talking player *nations* that wage war, build economies, and develop cultures. Working together, player nations establish sprawling continents with histories that span eons. The scope of the ARIA game is mind-boggling; comparing it to, say, the basic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game is like comparing a computer to an abacus.

Player nations derive from two concepts unique to this system: Narrative Environments (self-contained regional units, like villages or kingdoms) and Interactive Histories (phases of societal advancement). Under the referee's supervision, players begin the game by creating the game world, consisting of one or more Narrative Environments. By following the meticulous, step-by-step design procedure, players determine the Environment's geography, political framework, demographic composition, philosophical orientation, and status divisions. They also put together a rough time line, noting the game world's pivotal events (battles, landmark legislation, diplomatic alliances) and major personalities (military leaders, political figures, aristocratic families). Along the way, players decide which components of the Narrative Environments will serve as societal alter-egos—their player nations.

A set of statistics, called Determinants, define the player nations; in a sense, the Determinants are to player nations as attributes are to player characters. The Determinants are divided into three groups, Environment, Economic, and Political, each of which comprises several sub-categories. The Environment Determinant, for instance, has ratings for Scope, Military, and Technology, while the Political Determinant encompasses Power, Authority, and Suppression.

The player nations' simultaneous evolution (their Interactive Histories) forms the campaign. In most cases, a game turn consists of a single unit of Aria Time, roughly equivalent to five years. Aria Time consists of activity phases called Historic Intervals, where player nations respond to crises, make political decisions, and develop their resources. An Historic Interval begins with an Event introduced by the referee, analogous to a D&D® game random encounter, substituting a catastrophe (a famine, an earthquake) for a monster (a dragon, a ghoul). A phase of Internal Developments follows the Event, involving the resolution of Critical Junctures. A Critical Juncture may occur when a Determinant approaches a dangerous level; a high Suppression rating, for instance, may

lead to citizen unrest. Next comes the External Developments phase, where players interact with each other (conduct espionage, make attacks, and so on). Throughout, players declare Internal and External Actions, which the referee resolves in the final turn segment.

A player may perform two Internal Actions per Interval, along with a number of External Actions equal to half his player nation's Scope rating. The Action menu lists more than two dozen options. The Research Action invests in a technological breakthrough, such as a new agricultural style or metal smelting technique. The Fundamental Action alters one or more of the nation's political tenets; a democracy might become a monarchy, a free market economy might give way to socialism. The Invade Action may lead to war. Despite the abstractions, the system encourages vigorous role-playing. Instead of a player declaring, "I'll use the Fundamentals Action" when he wants to change governments, he announces something along the lines of: "In a special administrative session of the Swanville council, a small but vocal faction of freshman senators convinced the party elders to suspend the constitution and install a temporary monarchy."

A potpourri of tables and formulas help the referee resolve the Actions. Mostly, he relies on d10 rolls, called Trials, that pit Base Chances (fixed values given in the rules) and Ranks (derived from applicable Determinants) against Difficulty ratings (the likelihood of favorable outcomes) with as many modifiers as he cares to include. Outcomes range from Mythic Successes (achievements of historic proportions) to Catastrophic Failures (devastating setbacks), which in turn improve or reduce one or more of the affected Determinants. A successful Fundamentals action that switches governments might result in improved Authority and Military Determinants. A failure might result in reduced Relations and Humanities Determinants. Major Actions—a declaration of war, a new economy—also might affect attribute sub-categories called Incidentals, which measure demographic trends like Population, Wealth, and Cost of Living. To root the game in reality, the rules favor temporary changes over radical upheavals; the designers note that societal inertia tends to nudge a culture's basic elements back to their original levels. That's not only good game design, it's good anthropology.

The system isn't easy—here's one of the formulas for the Civil War Action: $[(\text{Power Value} + \text{Consent Value} + \text{Authority Value})/3] \times 0.1 = \text{Percent of Total Forces Controlled By Ruling Agency}$ —but it rewards the diligence with a gaming experience of unprecedented sweep. ARIA isn't just a role-playing version of Parker Brothers' RISK* game; it's more like Microprose's *Civilization* computer game (or for that matter, Avalon Hill's CIVILIZATION* board game) where players manage every aspect of cultural development. While the particulars differ from traditional

RPGs—juggling Humanities Determinants instead of Strength scores takes some getting used to—the dynamics are surprisingly similar. Where a D&D game group might include a greedy warrior and a curious wizard, an ARIA game group might include an avaricious village and a philosophic municipality. In either case, a memorable campaign depends on the players remaining true to the values of their alter egos. Adventures involve the interaction of strong personalities—which in the ARIA game, include groups as well as individuals—and solving problems in an unstable setting. And though ARIA players can declare war, promote instability, and make life miserable for one another in a number of other ways, they soon learn the value of cooperation, a lesson any good RPG should teach. Despite some bugs—the Narrative Environments tend to conform to Medieval European models; there aren't enough examples of play—this is groundbreaking work.

Those not up to the challenge of playing villages may choose standard characters instead. Depending on the style of the campaign, ARIA players may shift back and forth between player nations and player characters, or forego player nations altogether. But while the designers provide rigorously complete character-creation rules, they favor complexity over elegance. And once they start piling on complications, they reach the point of diminishing returns in a hurry.

A player begins by roughing out a general personality type indigenous to one of the active Narrative Environments. If the referee approves of the personality type, the player receives a number of Interaction Points based on the PC's age; the older you are, the more points you get to buy attributes and skills. But the procedure is an obstacle course of ambiguous rules ("Negative Interaction Point Costs indicate a bonus IP award for selecting an Underdeveloped Potential [Rank less than 5].") and mind-numbing gamespeak. ("The Expertises available to Personas during the years of Early Development are determined by their Status Archetype, the Environ Class of their Developmental Setting, and the Vocational Expertise of the Family Head.") Numbers are assigned to characteristics that ought to be role-played rather than quantified, like personality traits. Some of the numbers are baffling; what's the difference between the Influence Pool and the Leverage Pool ratings, both of which measure a PC's aptitude for persuasion? Incredibly, I found it easier to create a Narrative Environment—an entire setting—than a player character. And it was a lot more fun.

To resolve actions, player characters use essentially the same mechanics as player nations, making Trial rolls that incorporate Base Chances, Ranks, and Difficulties. Assuming the referee has a knack for accessing Difficulties—the text offers general guidelines but few specific examples—the rules are fine. Not so the

combat system, a quagmire of brain-straining dictums involving Action Intervals, Fatigue Trials, and Impact Reactions. To block a parry, for instance, the player must make a Challenged Trial roll against the opponent's Strike Chance (applying a Strength bonus to both the Speed and Defense modifiers), then cross-index the Attack Success against the Defense Success on the full-page Block Parry Results Table, which gives results like AF3 (Attack Parried/Fumble [Attacker makes Fumble Trail vs. Difficulty]) and DB (Defender Breaks Weapon [Defender makes Breakage Trial vs. Standard Difficulty]). Even walking is a nuisance; since you've got to consider Action Movement Rates, Quickness Ratings, and T&rain/Weather Modifiers, I'd just as soon be carried. Still, everything seems to work, and as a stand-alone tactical combat game, it's not bad. As a subsystem for an RPG, though, it's more trouble than it's worth.

The ingenious magic chapter features do-it-yourself mechanics in place of conventional spell lists. Working with the referee, the players first determine the Reality of the universe; that is, the master plan that explains the nature of Quintessence (the raw material of magic) and the Reality Origin (the source of Quintessence). The Origin Template consists of Form (the vehicle from which the Origin arises), Orientation (the Origin's relationship with rival Origins), and four other elements, each of which is divided into several categories, such as Totality and Peripheral. It sounds difficult, but the text helps the players fill in all the blanks. The resulting cosmology is self-consistent and impressively complete.

Since the text doesn't describe specific spells, mages invent their own effects using a cut-and-paste technique reminiscent of the ARS MAGICA game. After deciding on a desired effect, the player roughs out a formula called a Paradigm, consisting of a Configuration, Method, and several other components. If the referee approves, the player assigns a base Cost (in Quintessence) needed to trigger the effect. The referee regulates the amount of magic in the game world with Ease of Access ratings, numerical values attached to spell categories that represent the difficulty in accessing the Reality Origin. Creating a magic system from the ground up, even with rules this lucid, takes time. But if you have the patience, it's a fascinating way to spend a weekend. Or two.

The impressive *ARIA Worlds* book provides guidelines for creating realistic game settings, not just for the ARIA game, but for any fantasy RPG. Using statistical profiles, historical models, and a generous number of examples, the book explains how to design environmental profiles, economic infrastructures, and legal codes for eras ranging from the Stone Age to the Early Renaissance. The Technology and Innovation chapter features a clever meth-

od for measuring technological evolution, as well as suggestions for transferring discoveries from one culture to another. The Politics and Kinship chapter discusses the pros and cons of more than a dozen types of government. Nine sample societies, ranging from Pure Timocracy to Insane Visionary, round out the book. An inspired effort, marred only by stuffy writing, *Worlds* is a must for ARIA referees. And game designers, amateur and pro alike, should find it an indispensable reference, regardless of the systems they prefer.

Evaluation: The four-pip rating represents an average; the ARIA rules earns at least five pips for the player nation system, no more than three for character creation, five for the magic rules, and about four for everything else. If Moore and Seyler would've ditched the player character system and developed the player nation material a bit more, I suspect we'd be looking at an easy six-pipper.

Intricate and demanding, ARIA isn't for beginners; the combat rules alone are enough to make the average dungeon crawler bury his head in his hands and cower in the corner. And though the designers contend that "the numerical aspects of an ARIA persona should be down played," that objective pretty much goes down the toilet by the end of chapter two.

The ARIA game is such a hodgepodge of breakthroughs and boo-boos, it's hard to believe it all sprung from the minds of the same two guys. But I'm willing to overlook the missteps; I'm not the kind of guy who discovers a talking dog then complains about its diction. Borderline brilliant, the ARIA system may be the harbinger of an entirely new genre—and that's no understatement. (Write: Last Unicorn Games, P.O. Box H, New Cumberland PA 17070.)

CASTLE FALKENSTEIN* game

224-page softcover book

R. Talsorian Games, Inc.



\$27

Design: Michael Alyn Pondsmith

Editing: Derek Quintanar, Janice Sellers,

Mark Schumann, and Benjamin Wright

Illustrations: William C. Eaken, Gloria Yuh Jenkins, Erik Hotz, and Mark Schumann

Cover: William C. Eaken and Mark Schumann

I never could be a game publisher because I have no insight whatsoever as to which products will fail and which will succeed. Never in a million years would I have believed that White Wolf's *VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE** game would catch on like it did, and I cavalierly dismissed WotC's *MAGIC: THE GATHERING** card game as a fad, the gaming equivalent of Beatle wigs.

Then again, maybe the pros don't know any more than I do. They persist, for instance, in revisiting topics that the mar-



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ket repeatedly snubs. I'm thinking of Far East RPGs such as TSR's Oriental *Adventures*, and Fantasy Games Unlimited's BUSHIDO* and LAND OF THE RISING SUN* games. And RPGs of the wild west, like TSR's BOOT HILL® game and Steve Jackson's *Old West* GURPS* game variant. And the Viking supplements from the Avalon Hill Game Company, TSR, and Steve Jackson. Played any of these lately?

Quality, apparently, has little to do with long term success; most of these products are pretty good, Oriental Adventures and GULPS *Old West* in particular. Some topics, I guess, gamers resist, no matter how good the package.

Here's hoping that the Victorian-era CASTLE FALKENSTEIN game bucks the trend, because friends, this is about as good as it gets. We've been down this road before, with products as diverse as Chaosium's *Cthulhu by Gaslight* expansion for the CALL OF CTHULHU* game and GDW's stellar SPACE: 1889* game. But where previous efforts stuck pretty close to the literary traditions of 19th century London, Mike Pondsmith, ace designer of the underrated TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE* and DREAM PARK* games, has turned the Victorian era upside down.

First, this isn't Victorian London *per se*, but an alternative reality that's one part fact, ten parts fun house; it's as if Pondsmith tossed a history text, a copy of *Alice in Wonderland*, and a Monty Python video cassette into a blender. New Europa, the game world, is a crazy quilt of steam-age technology and social anarchy. Dwarven engineers program clockwork computers and fit Napoleonic War amputees with robotic limbs. Dragons operate restaurants. Queen Victoria hires necromancers to send love letters to her dead consort. The cast of characters includes the bizarre Mad King Ludwig, sort of an evil twin of Elvis Presley, and Marianne, "a fashion model with the reflexes of a cat and the fighting instincts of a rabid badger" whom I intend to marry in my next life. [Note: *Get in line, buddy. I saw her first.*

—Dale]

Most of the action takes place in the mid-New European country of Bayern, a cluster of gingerbread villages and lush woodlands overrun with leprechauns and nature spirits. It's a delightful setting, bursting with potential. Characters can hunt vampires with Dr. Van Helsing, explore the Atlantean Ocean in Captain Nemo's submarine, or arm themselves with pepperbox revolvers and take on the Steam Lords of Britain.

The lavish presentation makes for an almost sensual experience. Half the book is printed in lush colors, highlighted by pastel portraits of King Ludwig and Marianne, vivid maps of New Europa, and a full-page depiction of a dragon shaking hands with a Victorian gentleman while a steam zeppelin hovers overhead. Tinted sidebars adjoin illustrated essays in a seamless blend of words and images.

Pondsmith shuns jargon and self-indulgent digressions in favor of an uncluttered, conversational tone; any wonder he's one of the industry's premiere stylists?

A FALKENSTEIN player character uses neither statistics nor character sheets. Instead, he's defined by a set of number-free descriptions (FALKENSTEIN doesn't use dice, either). To construct a PC, the player first settles on a general template based on sex: men are Heroes (Heroic, Tragic, or Flawed), women are Heroines (Innocent, Clever, Tragic, or Fallen; incidentally, Pondsmith sidesteps Victorian sexism by assuring us that New European females enjoy a higher status than their real-life counterparts). Next, the player chooses an archetype from a list including Anarchist, Diplomat, Dashing Hussar, Mad Scientist, and Steam Engineer. Each archetype includes a brief description, an inventory of possessions, and a few aptitudes (called Strong Suits). The Diplomat, for example, owns a sword cane and a code book, and has Strong Suits in Education and Perception. The Anarchist has Marksmanship and Charisma as Strong Suits; he carries two bombs and a copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*. The player then creates a Character Diary for his PC, outlining his background, virtues, and ambitions. An excerpt from the diary of Captain Andre LeCorbessier, an Heroic Hero Dashing Hussar, reads: "In this year of Our Lord, Eighteen seventy, I take pen to paper to chronicle my adventures in the Service of King and Country . . . My goals in life are simple: to command my own company, to become recognized for my soldierly skills, and to one day meet and marry a lady of refinement and breeding." Though keeping a diary is a little like having homework, those with even a modest flair for writing ought to be able to pull it off. For the journalistically challenged, I suggest an additional archetype: the Illiterate Heathen.

Players who've had their fill of human PCs may opt for dragons, dwarves, and faeries. But while each has distinct advantages—dragons breathe fire, dwarves resist magic, faeries fly—they come with so much baggage that they're barely worth the effort. FALKENSTEIN dragons aren't the terrifying behemoths familiar to AD&D game players, but light-boned wimps about as threatening as professional wrestlers. Faeries must avoid metal; riding on iron warships gives them headaches. Dwarves aren't bad, but they all have to be male (they mate with the all-female faeries). I got so sick of my dragon PCs complaining about their physiques and the faerie PCs shrieking whenever they saw a nail that I banned them from the game. Stick with human PCs; consign dragons and faeries to the supporting cast.

Once he's done with his diary, the player rounds out his PC by consulting the list of skills. Choices range from standard stuff like Athletics and Courage, to the exotic Exchequer (economic status) and Etherealness (the ability to assume a mist-like form). Skills are ranked at six levels, expressed as adjectives: Poor, Average, Good,

Great, Exceptional, and Extraordinary. Regardless of his PC's archetype, the player selects one Great skill, four Good skills, and one Poor skills. All leftover skills are automatically Average.

Skill resolution uses a deck of ordinary playing cards. At the outset of a game, the referee deals everybody a set of four cards, himself included. Each card has a rating equal to its face value; the eight of hearts is worth eight, the Jack of diamonds is worth 11. Skills also have face values, derived from their levels; Poor skills have a value of two, Extraordinary skills have a value of 12. When a player wants to try an action, he decides which skill applies; swimming probably would be considered an Athletics skill (if in doubt, the referee decides). The final ability score equals the face value of the relevant skill plus the values of as many cards as he wishes to play. He compares this score to the feat's difficulty value, determined by the referee; swimming across an icy lake might be an Exceptional feat, giving it a difficulty value of 10. The referee may play cards from his hand to make the feat more difficult still. If the player's score is less than the difficulty value, the attempt fails; if it's greater than or equal to the difficulty value, it succeeds. Combat operates essentially the same way. Sure, it's a gimmick—the cards work no better or worse than dice—but it's a refreshing gimmick, one requiring a knack for bluffing and a good poker face.

Spell-casters use a second deck of cards, called the Sorcery Deck. When a player wants to cast a spell, he draws one Sorcery Card for every two minutes of game time until he acquires enough power to make the attempt. If he's lucky, the spell works the way he wants it to. Otherwise, the spell may backfire, triggering an earthquake or summoning a demon. And if a joker pops up in the Sorcery Deck, the spell goes off spontaneously. Because it takes time to cast spells and backfires can be disastrous, the system discourages players from spewing *death wish* and *shake the earth* at the drop of the hat.

The sample adventure, an engaging quest for the mysterious Man in Black, hints at the game's possibilities, though at less than three pages, it doesn't do it justice. Referees not up to designing their own scenarios will have to wait for the supplements. And players wanting more detail about Bayern, clockwork engineering, and the Unseelie faeries—a cadre of supernatural bad guys who'll probably turn out to be FALKENSTEIN's main villains—also have to wait. If the source book material seems superficial in spots, consider it a consequence of ambition; Pondsmith has more good ideas than space to put them in.

Evaluation: The text is presented as a first-person account of Thomas Edward Olam, a "friend" of Mike Pondsmith who was whisked away to New Europa, then sent the game's manuscript to Pondsmith's

house to share his discoveries. The contemporary viewpoint makes for a brisk read and user-friendly mechanics, and I think—I hope—it'll spare the CASTLE FALKENSTEIN game from oblivion. Pondsmith seems optimistic, as he's promised an extensive line of expansions and source books; *Engine Magick* looks especially intriguing. At any rate, I'm keeping my fingers crossed. The CASTLE FALKENSTEIN game deserves serious support. If it winds up in a grave next to the LAND OF THE RISING SUN RPG, I'll be terribly disappointed.

Short and sweet

GATEWAR* game by Ken Burridge and Robert Finkbeiner. Escape Ventures, Inc., \$30.

Though it doesn't say so on the cover, this is the third edition of the ELEMENT MASTERS* game, an eccentric RPG noted for its odd blend of science fiction and fantasy. The rules are fairly standard, old-fashioned even, with a race-based character-creation system using everyday attributes such as Strength, Constitution, and Appearance. Skill rolls resolve most actions (roll your ability score or less on 1d100—you know the drill). Though Vinya, the game setting, won't make anyone forget Glorantha or Krynn, it boasts an appealing cast of characters and an extraordinary menagerie of wacky creatures. Instead of human and elven PCs, the GATEWAR system features Bruff, squat mountaineers with a penchant for snowboarding, and the Unspeakable, fur-covered water-dwellers with webbed toes. Vinyans make pets of Mips, sort of a cross between a squirrel and a grasshopper, and covet Licking Wonders, living tongues who slurp their owners clean (yikes!). Unfortunately, the GATEWAR game relies too much on stock fantasy conventions to make it a contender. The spells don't get much more imaginative than *ghost missile* and *invisibility*, while the weapon list reels off the usual assortment of long swords and war hammers. Still, the whimsical flourishes, like the essay titled "How to Prepare and Cook Mip," make the GATEWAR RPG worth a look for fans of the offbeat. (Write: Escape Ventures, Inc., PO. Box 65077, Virginia Beach VA 23467.)

Maps 2: Places of Legend, by Debora Kerr, S.S. Crompton, Anita, William Kerr, Mike Keller, Eric Dinehart, Bryan C. Bullcock, and James Walker. Flying Buffalo, Inc., \$12.

And speaking of offbeat, how'd you like to help Santa Claus prevent a hostile takeover of the North Pole? Or defend Oz's Emerald City against an incursion from the Deadly Desert? These are but two of the mythological settings outlined in this charming anthology, which also includes Camelot and the Bermuda Triangle. Like its predecessor, *Maps 1: Cities*, *Maps 2* is statistic-free, usable with any RPG system. It's an invaluable resource for those who want to design their own fantasy adventures

but don't know where to begin.

Planes of Chaos, by Lester Smith and Wolfgang Baur. TSR, Inc., \$30.

Of the various subdivisions of the AD&D game cosmology, the chaotic planes are arguably the most interesting and potentially the most disappointing. For years, we've been assured that Limbo, the Abyss, and Pandemonium are mind-blowing locales teeming with adventure possibilities. But in the absence of hard information—anyone recall seeing a Pandemonium source book?—we've had to take these assurances on faith. This dazzling PLANESCAPE™ setting boxed set exceeds expectations. The four volumes, spanning some 240 pages, reveals the secrets of the spectre wars of airless Naratyr, describes an elven city concealed in the limbs of Grandfather Oak, and takes us up the Infinite Staircase of Ysgard that winds through all time and space. Bleeding winds blow through the tunnels of the Cocytus, the second layer of Pandemonium. Young tritons battle fluorescent kraken in Caletto, a turbulent water realm in the plane of Aborea. A text-packed poster map summarizes dozens of the layers of Abyss; bat-winged monstrosities inhabit Layer 377, Layer 13 marks the site of a baatezu incursion. With crisp prose and vivid descriptions, Smith and Baur not only have captured the setting's eerie majesty, but have done so in astonishing detail.

Royalty and Rogues, by Christopher Hussey. FASA Corporation, \$10.

Good adventures for FASA's MECH-WARRIOR* game haven't exactly been falling out of the sky, so this book-length scenario comes as a pleasant surprise. The player characters visit the devastated planet Bryceland to investigate a piracy ring and challenge some 'Mech-riding bad guys to a duel in the Antallos desert. A lot of stuff blows up, a lot of 'Mech-riders bite the dust. Well-organized and filled with glitzy hardware, what the plot lacks in characterization it makes up in breathless action. Though the book suggests the referee use 10 (!) FASA products as reference, ranging from the *Solaris VII* boxed set to a quartet of *Technical Readouts*, we got along just fine with only the MECH-WARRIOR and BATTLETECH* game rules.

The Complete Druid's Handbook, by David Pulver. TSR, Inc., \$18.

The now-familiar format of this line serves up a host of new kits (Beastfriend, Hivemaster, Shapeshifter) and spells (*animal spy*, *cloudscape*, *needlestorm*) along with an informative discussion of sacred groves (druids prefer ponds to streams, because still water is less distracting). Of particular interest to novice players, Pulver uses clear examples to explain the art of playing neutral characters; for instance, a druid won't kill a dragon just because it's evil, but he might if it threatens his forest. A satisfying entry in one of TSR's most ambitious projects.

King of Chicago, by Gary Sumpter, Ugo Bardi, L.N. Isinwyll, and Tadashi Ehara. Chaosium Inc., \$11.

Al Capone meets the Deep Ones in this Prohibition-era adventure compilation for the CALL OF CTHULHU game. Against a backdrop of afterhour casinos and bootleg liquor, Sumpter's "King of Chicago" plops the Investigators in the middle of a bloody gangland war. Set in southern France, Bardi's "Secret of Marseilles" features Corsican extortionists, a fortune in gold, and an island that oozes slime. Smart stories, authentic atmosphere, good scares. Not many monsters, though.

Fighters Player Pack and **Thief's Player Pack**, by William W. Connors. TSR, Inc., \$20 each.

One of the joys of any hobby is collecting all the junk that goes with it. These AD&D game accessories (which also come in wizard and thief versions) are a pack rat's dream come true. Each case comes with everything a newcomer needs to get his PC campaign-ready, and I mean *everything*: a pad of character sheets, a stand-up reference screen, a brief but informative player's guide, seven high-quality polyhedral dice, three pewter miniatures, and even a shiny red pencil. As a bonus, your *Player's Handbook* (not included) fits snugly inside the lid. Though recommended for ages 10 to adult, the *Player Packs* tilt toward the younger end of that scale—I can't imagine a 40-year-old hauling around a plastic briefcase. But if you're trying to lure a reluctant youngster into your campaign, you couldn't ask for better bait.

Ω

Rick Swan, the author of The Complete Guide to Role-Playing Games (St. Martin's Press), has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply.

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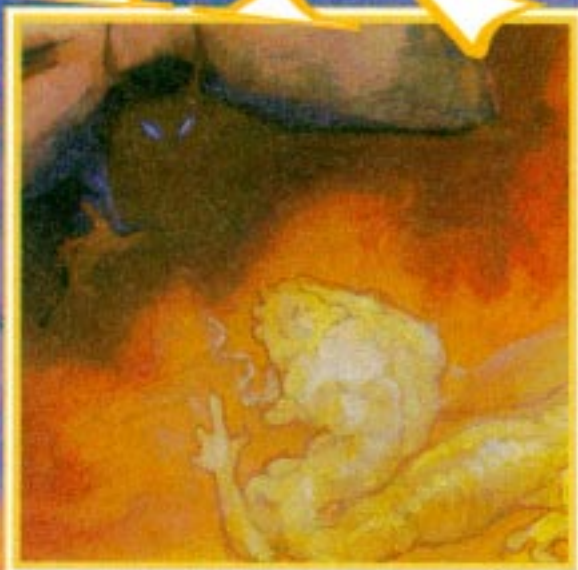
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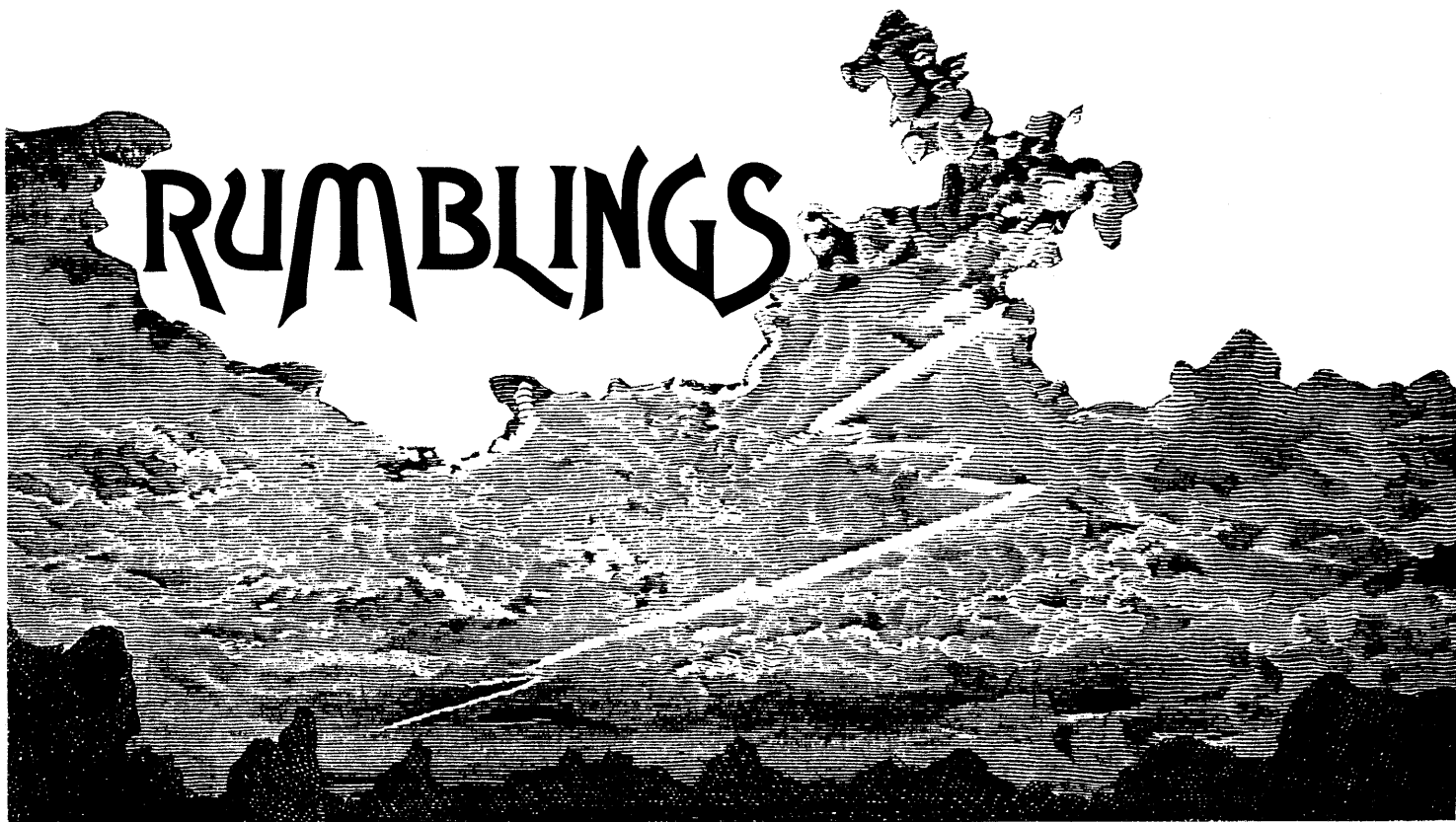
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News of people & events in the gaming industry

You can send us news, press releases, and announcements using the Internet at TSR.mags@genie.geis.com. We also welcome your comments at Rumbblings, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.

Lead Story: WILDSpace™ TV Show

MCA/Universal, TSR, Inc., and Ground Zero Productions have entered a major multimedia agreement to produce the WILDSpace live-action TV program and an interactive theme park event. Twenty-two one-hour episodes of the show are in development for prime-time network television; the theme park event will be at Universal Studios (natch). WILDSpace electronic games, a board game, and action figures also are likely; announcements are likely at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas and the Toy Fair in New York.

Jeff Segal, president of MCA/Universal Studios, explains, "Everyone at MCA/Universal believes that WILDSpace has the kind of breakout, hit potential, that . . . will be a fitting launch to a long-term relationship between ourselves and TSR." Flint Dille, President of Ground Zero, describes the filming technique as something unique that "will look like a live comic book—combining live action, animation, and computer generated images in a

way never done before."

In movie news, Sweetpea Entertainment has acquired the exclusive motion picture and merchandising rights to "DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®: the Movie." Rumor has it that the movie's budget tops \$100 million. Special-effects wizard Stan Winston also is reported to be handling the film's special effects.

Turn of a friendly card game

The BLOOD WARS™ card game is due to be released (or is that unleashed?) any day now. Designed by TSR veteran Steven Schend, the game is a graphically-lush set of 334 cards featuring new art by Tony DiTerlizzi, Newton Ewell, Dana Knutson, Robb Lazaretti, and Dave Sutherland. Players take on the roles of fiends and struggle to conquer the planes, and may use either of two modes of combat: political intrigue or blood-letting with legions on the battlefield. Look for a complete card listing in a future issue of DRAGON® Magazine.

The HIGHLANDER* card game license has been picked up by Thunder Castle Games, the same company that produced the TOWERS IN TIME* card game. The HIGHLANDER game involves a sword battle between two immortals; it will be released in March, to coincide with the release of the third Highlander movie. (Hopefully, this film will be better than the woeful *Highlander II*.) The cards' images

and art will be drawn from the TV series; the game's designer is Mike Sager. Thunder Castle also will release the Greek edition of TOWERS IN TIME game in March.

The STAR OF THE GUARDIANS* card game is out, and the first expansion is already well under way. Based on Margaret Weis's novels of the same name, the game is designed by Don Perrin. Due to the small size of the alpha print run, this game should be extremely collectable.

Bryan Winter, designer of the DOOM TROOPER* card game, may soon be watching a midnight sun. Rumor has it that Target AB, the company that owns the DOOM TROOPER and MUTANT CHRONICLES* trademarks, has offered him a full-time position. First the KULT* game, now this; can the Swedes claw their way to worldwide role-playing dominance?

Keith Parkinson is rumored to be putting together a card game with assistance from fellow freelance artists. Jim Lee of Marvel and Image Comics fame also is said to be pondering a collectible card game. When will the madness end?

We stand corrected

It seems that one previous rumbling was ill-informed: White Wolf Game Studio and Dirt Merchant Games do not have an agreement to reprint DMG's HoL. *Rumbblings* regrets the error.

Jumping ship

Mark Copplestone, Grenadier's number one sculptor, has accepted a position with Heartbreaker Miniatures.

Tony Szczudlo has moved from FASA to TSR; he is best known for his fine artistic contributions to FASA's EARTHDAWN* game. At TSR he is working on developing the look of the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign world, a new setting that allows players to run entire feudal domains, as well as take their chances with traditional quests.

Freelancer Newton Ewell, known for his work for Palladium Books and TSR, has joined Magnet Interactive Studios as an animator on the *Hellraiser* CD-ROM project. His current work is described as both "goeey" and "spiky." Don't take any chances, Newt, that Pinhead dude can be a killer.

A minor miracle

FASA Corp. was apparently caught unaware that the BATTLETECH action figures were already on sale; almost unheard of in the industry, the figures shipped two months early! Just in time for last Christmas, how convenient.

White Wolf weirdness

Stephen Pagel, the national SF, Fantasy, and Role-playing buyer for Barnes & Noble chain of bookstores, joins White Wolfs

sales staff this month. The move is well-timed, since White Wolf hopes to launch its fiction line into a wider market this year. Mr. Pagel is well-known in the book trade as an expert in SF and fantasy.

In other WW weirdness, a posting on the Internet claims that White Wolf Magazine will be relaunched as INPHOBIA, a glitzy mass-market magazine for a high-school and college Goth/horror/trendoid audience.

The WW TV show reported in these pages a few months ago has indeed come to pass; the setting will be San Francisco, and the series will air on the Fox Network beginning in summer or fall of this year.

Magazine madness

The TSR Magazine staff has undergone a big round of musical chairs recently. Barbara Young, editor of DUNGEON® Adventures, has been promoted to managing editor of the TSR Book Department. Wolfgang Baur, the associate editor, will take her place at the helm of DUNGEON Magazine. Congratulations to them both! Dale Donovan, the driving force behind DRAGON Magazine, is moving to the Games department to join TSR's world-famous design staff. Good luck, Dale!

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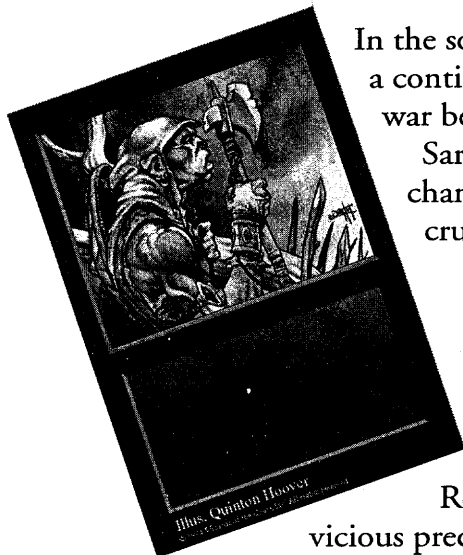
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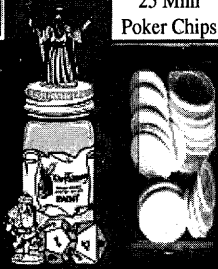
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Convention Calendar

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines **must** be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing **must** include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

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Important: DRAGON® Magazine no longer publishes phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

CAPRICON XV, Feb. 16-19 IL
This convention will be held at Wyndham Hamilton Hotel in Itasca, Ill. Guests include Nancy Kress, Lucy Synk, and Sue Blom. Events include anime, panels, demos, workshops, film, a cabaret, a masquerade dance, art shows, and a blood drive. Registration: \$40 on site. Write to: CAPRICON XV, PO. Box 60085, Chicago IL 60660.

DUNDRACON XIX, Feb. 17-20 CA
This convention will be held at Marriott Hotel in San Ramon, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games, seminars, tournaments, video games, movies, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$35/weekend or \$15/day on site. Write to: DUNDRACON, 1145 Talbot St., Albany CA 94706.

GENGHIS CON XVI, Feb. 17-19 c o
This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Southeast in Denver, Colo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer gaming, a figure-painting contest, auctions, and dealers. Registration: \$15 preregistered. Write to: Denver Gamers Assoc., PO. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

KATSUCON ONE, Feb. 17-19 VA
This anime/manga convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Va. Activities include panels, workshops, an amateur film fest, an art show, dance, and anime. Registration: \$30. Write to: Katsu Prod., PO. Box 11582, Blacksburg VA 24062-1582; or e-mail at: katsucan@vtserf.cc.vt.edu.

ORCCON 18, Feb. 18-20 CA
This convention will be held at Airport Hyatt Hotel in Los Angeles, Calif. Events include all types of family, strategy, and adventure board, role-playing, miniatures, and computer gaming. Other activities include flea markets, an auction, dealers, seminars, and demos. Registration: \$25

preregistered; \$30 on site. Write to: STRATEGICON, PO. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849.

TOTAL CONFUSION, IX, Feb. 23-26 MA
This convention will be held at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel & Convention Center in Marlboro, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dinner-theater production. Registration: \$30/weekend or \$10/day preregistered; \$12/day on site. Write to: TOTAL CONFUSION, PO. Box 1463, Worcester MA 01607.

JAXCON '95, Feb. 24-26 FL
This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn Conference Center in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include door prizes, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$22 on site. Single-day rates are available. Write to: JAXCON, PO. Box 14218, Dep't. M, Jacksonville FL 32238-4218.

RADCON 1C, Feb. 24-26 WA
This convention will be held at the Best Western Tower Inn in Richland, Wa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, dealers, an art show, movies, demos, and gaming. Registration: \$18. Write to: RADCON 1C, 2527 W. Kennewick Ave., #162, Kennewick WA 99336.

POINTCON II, Feb. 25-26 WI
This convention will be held at the University Center on the UW-Stevens Point campus in Stevens Point, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, door prizes, and dealers. Registration: \$2/event; \$3/4 per tournament. Send an SASE to: GASP, Box 41, Univ. Activities Office, Univ. Center UWSP, Stevens Point WI 54481.

CONCENTRIC '95, March 3-5 IL
This convention will be held at Ramada Hotel O'Hare in Chicago, Ill. Guests include Lynn Abbey and Larry Elmore. Events include role-playing, board, computer, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, seminars, films, anime, the blood drive, and a masquerade ball. Registration: \$17 on site. Write to: Concentric Circle Inc., 114 Euclid, Box 287, Park Ridge IL 60068.

EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN '95 IL
March 3-5
This convention will be held at Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Guests include David Gross. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a game auction, and miniatures-painting and art contests. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 on site. Single-day and visitor passes are available. Write to: EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN, c/o SIUC Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor Student Center, Carbondale IL 62901-4425.

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
- indicates a European convention.

TENN CON '95, March 4-5 TN
This convention will be held at the Knoxville Convention Center in Knoxville, Tenn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card-game events. Registration: \$25 (plus tax) on site. Write to: TENN CON '95, c/o Gameboard, 3018 B Mall Rd. N., Suite #161, Knoxville, TN 37924.

WARP'DCON V, Mar. 4 NJ
This convention originally was scheduled to take place Dec. 3, 1994. It be held at Drew University in Madison, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, a raffle, an auction, and door prizes. Registration: \$5. Write to: Richard Ditullio, PO. Box 802, C.M. Box 1405, Madison NJ 07940.

CON OF THE NORTH '95
March 10-12 MN
This convention will be held at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, Minn. Events include role-playing, board, computer, and miniatures games. Registration fees vary. Write to: CON OF THE NORTH, PO. Box 18096, Minneapolis MN 55418.

COSCON '95, March 10-12 PA
This convention will be held at the Days Inn Conference Center in Butler, Pa. Guests include Jean Rabe. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, dealers, and demos. Registration: \$20 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, PO. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003.

PRINCECON XX, March 10-12 NJ
This convention will be held at Whig Hall on the Princeton University campus in Princeton, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an AD&D® game variant that lets you play one character all weekend. Registration: \$15. Write to: Aaron Mulder, 46 Holder Hall, Princeton Univ., Princeton NJ 08554; or e-mail: ammulder@princeton.edu.

EX UNICON II, March 11-12
This convention will be held at Reed Hall on the Exeter University campus in Devon, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a charity auction. Write to: Exeter Univ. Games Society, c/o Mr. R. Stewart, 25, Victoria St., Exeter, Devon, ENGLAND EX4 6JQ.

GAMER'S CON II, March 17-19 NJ
This convention will be held at the Sheraton Hotel in Cherry Hill, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games, dealers, a game auction, seminars, and demos. Registration: \$20/weekend on site. Single-day rates vary. Write to: Multigenre Inc., 142 South St., Unit 9C, Red Bank NJ 07701-2502; or e-mail: acd@hotld.att.com.

SIMCON XVII, March 23-26 NY
This convention will be held at Wilson Commons on the University of Rochester campus in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and open gaming. Registration: \$8 before March 15; \$10 thereafter. Tournaments fees are \$3; most other event fees are \$2. Write to: SIMCON XVII, c/o URSGA, CPU 277146-River Station, Rochester NY 14627-7146.

CONNCON '95, March 24-26 CT
This convention will be held at the Danbury Hilton & Towers in Danbury, Conn. Guests include Jean Rabe and Sam Lewis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, miniature-painting, costume, and art contests, and an awards banquet. Write to: CONNCON, PO. Box 444, Sherman CT 06784-0444.

MAGE CON NORTH I, March 24-26 SD
This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Hotel in Sioux Falls, S.D. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and a silent auction. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$8/day on site. Write to: MAGE CON NORTH I, PO. Box 114, Sioux Center IA 51250.

MIDSOUTHCON 14, March 24-26 TN
This SF convention will be held at the Best Western Airport Hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Guests include Timothy Zahn and Alan Gutierrez. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: MIDSOUTHCON, PO. Box 22749, Memphis TN 38122.

NEOVENTION XIV, March 24-26 OH
This convention will be held at the Student Center of the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games and videos. Registration: \$15 preregistered; \$17 on site. Write to: University Gaming Society, Gardner Student Center, Office #6, Univ. of Akron, Akron OH 44325.

SCOTCON '95, March 24-26 OH
This convention will be held at Lowry Center on the College of Wooster campus in Wooster, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games. Registration fees vary. Write to: Avery Leckrone, Box C-1706 COW, Wooster OH 44691.

COASTCON XVIII, March 31-April 2 MS
This convention will be held at the Miss. Gulf Coast Coliseum/Convention Center in Biloxi, Miss. Guests include Mike Stackpole, Steve Perry, Jennifer Roberson, and George Alec Effinger. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, a charity auction, dealers, videos, and writing and costume contests. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: COASTCON XVII, PO. Box 1423, Biloxi MS 39533-1423.

I-CON 14, March 31-April 2 NY
This not-for-profit convention will be held at the SUNY campus in Stony Brook, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include SF&F, comics, and anime. Write to: I-CON, PO. Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790-0550.

PENTECON VII, March 31-April 2 NY
This convention will be held at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and movies. Write to: Pentagon Committee, c/o Kris Mayo, 219 Willard Way, Ithaca NY 14850; or e-mail: pentecon@cornell.edu.

TECHNICON 12, March 31-April 1 VA
This is a revised, updated listing. This convention will be held at the Best Western Red Lion Inn in Blacksburg, Va. Guests include Christie Golden, Melissa Scott, Don Sakers, and Tom Atkinson. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games, panels, an art show and auction, filking, videos and anime, computer games, and dealers. Write to: TECHNICON 12, c/o VTSFFC, PO. Box 256, Blacksburg VA 24063-0356; or e-mail via the Internet: Technicon@VTCCL.cc.vt.edu.

UBCON '95, March 31-April 2 NY
This convention will be held at North campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo in Amherst, N.Y. Guests include Sam Chupp. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games, an auction, dealers, anime, and SCA demos. Registration fees range from \$5-10. Write to: UB-SARPA, 363 Student Union, SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo NY 14260-2100; or e-mail: SARPA@ubvms.cc.buffalo.edu.

RAWACON '95, April 1 PA
This convention will be held at the gymnasium on the campus of Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, dealers, and artists. Registration: \$2.50 preregistered; \$5 on site. Write to: RAWACON '95, 33-B N Railroad St., Palmyra PA 17078; or e-mail: DPADDOCK@ACAD.LVC.EDU.

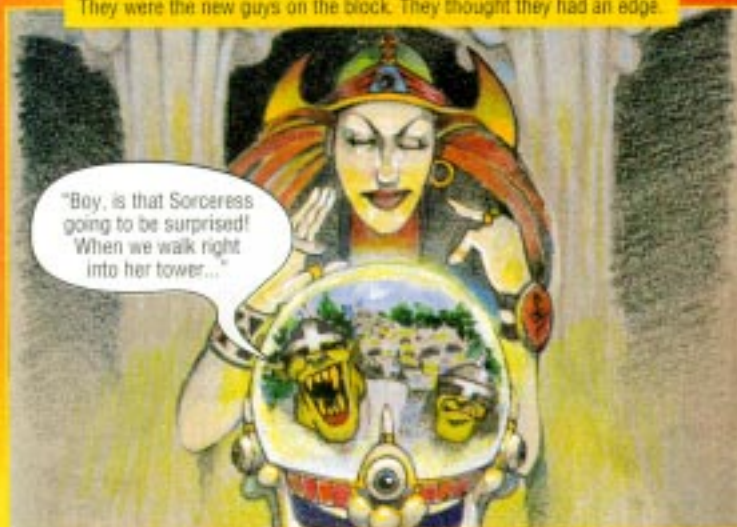
GLARE-VOYANCE II, April 8 CA
This convention will be held at Claremont Colleges in Claremont, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games and a card-game tournament. Registration: \$5 preregistered; \$15 on site. Write to: Thomas M. Kane, 150 Annapolis Dr., Claremont CA 91711.

OPCON '95, April 8 IL
This convention will be held at Oak Park & River Forest High School in Oak Park, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card-game tournaments. Registration: \$4 preregistered; \$6 on site. Write to: Oak Park & River Forest HS, c/o Sandy Price, 201 N. Scoville Ave., Oak Park IL 60302.

GAME FAIRE '95, April 21-23 WA
This convention will be held at the Student Union of Spokane Falls Community College in Spokane, Wash. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a used-game auction, anime, a miniatures-painting contest, tournaments, and open gaming. Registration: \$18 before April 11; \$20 on site. Write to: Merlyn's, N. 1 Browne, Spokane WA 99201.

FRANKCONSTEIN '95, April 21-23 MO
This convention will be held at the Radisson Hotel Clayton in St. Louis, Mo. Guests include Glen Cook, Mickey Zucker Reichert, Laurell K. Hamilton, and Wilson "Bob" Tucker. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, a masquerade, a dance, videos, dealers, and filking. Registration: \$15 before March 1; \$22 thereafter. Write to: Name That Con, PO. Box 575, St. Charles MO 63302.

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KETTERING GAME CON XII
April 22-23

OH

This convention will be held at the Charles I. Lathrem Senior Center in Kettering, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network tournaments, computer games, card games, and a game auction. Registration: \$2/day. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering OH 45429.

MAGIC CARPET CON 3, April 28-30 GA

This convention will be held at the North Georgia Convention and Trade Center in Dalton, Ga. Guests include Elizabeth Moon, Tom Deitz, and Mark Poole. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a masquerade, an art show and auction, and a con suite. Registration: \$25 before March 15; \$30 on site. Write to: MAGIC CARPET CON 3, P.O. Box 678, Rocky Face GA 30740; or SusanB14 on America On-line.

SPRINGCON '95, April 28-30 NE

This gaming convention will be held at the ReUnion Building in Lincoln, Nebr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: Free to the public. Novices and interested nongamers are encouraged to attend. Write to: SPRINGCON Committee, Box 1126, 905 N. 16th St., Lincoln NE 68508.

GENERAL CON '95, April 29-30 PA

This convention will be held at the Carlisle Army War College in Carlisle, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and tourna-

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Write to: Chris McGuigan, 2010, Hillside Dr., Burlingame CA 94010.

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Write to: Scott Douglas, 316.5 E. Duffy, Norman OK 73069.

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April S-S IN

Write to: Randall Lemon, PO. Box 9005, Highland IN 46322.

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Write to: Eric Kline, PO. Box 90182, Honolulu HI 96835.

CAP CON '95, April 15-16 OH

Write to: Patrick Connolly, 2509 Deming Ave., Columbus OH 43202.

CON-TROLL '95, April 22-23 TX

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The Ecology of

The Neogi

The demons of the Flow

by Jon Winter

Artwork by David O. Miller

"Ship ahoy!" The sharp cry from the crow's nest launched the crew into a flurry of frenzied activity; loading ballistae, hoisting sails, grabbing hand weapons, and lashing barrels to the decks.

"Raise the cloaking helm!" Captain Orlando shouted down to the bridge. A shimmering, colorless wall of magical force materialized around the *Blue Jay*. To an onlooker, the shriekship and her elven crew would have simply vanished, blending perfectly with the starry backcloth of space.

Red and wicked, a massive neogi deathspider cruised effortlessly toward the smaller ship. Web-like sails glistened between its huge grappling claws, scattering silver-orange light below. *Blood Glory* was the name daubed in black on the deathspider's hull.¹ Slowly, ominously, silently, the claws parted. The forward shell of the 'spider retracted, exposing the deck beneath. Even from this distance tiny figures could be seen, swarming about the weapons platform between the catapults, fol-

lowed by lumbering, hulking monstrosities.

"They've spotted us!" At the shout from above, Orlando's heart sank. A catapult stone from the 'spider whisked past, dangerously close.

"Hard a-port!" The shriekship suddenly rolled onto one side, throwing the gravity plane out of line for a brief instant. The deathspider spun, and the stars spiralled across the void. The *Blue Jay* lurched forward, doubling its speed as it passed the shell of the 'spider.

"Fire at the hulks!" Three ballista bolts shot whining from the shriekship, then their scream was abruptly silenced by the void. A barrage of missile fire followed from the elves, their arrows streaking toward the larger ship. Cheers from the crew greeted the sight of two of the massive hulks falling from the 'spider, pierced with arrows and ballista bolts.

Slowly, almost ponderously, the deathspider turned on the shriekship. With the attack the *Blue Jay's* cloak had fallen, and the neogi were upon them. . . .

Crunch! The whole ship shook violently under the impact of a huge catapult stone. As Alvirath watched the battle unfolding from her position at the helm, sharp flashes of white pain stabbed at her mind; jettison fire crashing onto the upper deck.

Wheeling around, the shriekship dove beneath the *Blood Glory*, which hung motionless in the void, impossibly huge, defying gravity. Numerous ballistae fired their lethal bolts at the *Jay*. The small ship heaved as cracks appeared in the hull and one wing was torn away.

"Return fire!" Captain Orlando's voice rang out clear above the surviving crew's cries of alarm. Simultaneously the shriekship's three ballistae fired. Three bolts sped toward the 'spider, crashing silently into her crystalline hull. The elves cheered raggedly, but their dwindling courage evaporated as the 'spider mercilessly bore down upon the crippled *Blue Jay* once again.

Bright signal lights flared from lamps at the bow of the shriekship. Red, yellow, yellow; the code for parlay. Orlando crossed his elven fingers, praying the stories he had heard of the neogi were exaggerated.² He did not breathe until a returning flash came, seconds later. He mouthed the words silently as he translated them:

"Surrender or die."

Before Orlando even had time to order a retreat, the *Blood Glory* moved. Colossal grappling claws crashed onto the *Jay's* deck, ripping through the rails and crushing the hull. Already figures swarmed down the grappling legs; weak, pale human slaves shambling vaguely as if they were undead, and hulking blue-black creatures with swirling, mesmerizing eyes.³

The next few minutes were chaos. The *Jay's* crew hacked randomly at anything that moved, but the neogi's slaves quickly eliminated resistance. Four of the spider-like neogi scuttled down the legs of the deathspider and stood on the edge of the *Jay's* deck, dancing and chanting strange hissing words of arcane power in their foul language.⁴

Orlando shouted to his crew to attack the spell-casting neogi, but most were already bewitched by the hulks. They slashed at each other, the hulks, or anything else that was near. Feeling a stabbing pain in his lower leg, Orlando recoiled in horror as a neogi sank its fangs into his flesh. Lethargy coursed through his veins and, almost in slow motion, he stumbled backward. A sharp cuff over the head sent Orlando reeling toward the deck and into darkness.⁵

Within five minutes the ship was overrun; the hulks began stripping the shriekship of anything even remotely valuable. The bodies and surviving crew of the *Blue Jay* were bound by the mindless zombie-slaves, and dragged back into the 'spider. Leaving the shriekship a drifting wreck, the *Blood Glory* turned and left the gruesome scene, 'jamming off into the depths of the Stellar Main.⁶

In the distance, a dim star changed its course and began to follow. . . .

Allowing his sensitive elven eyes to adjust to the dim light, Orlando sat up

slowly. His head was still throbbing from the blow he had received. As the room came into focus, he could see he was in a dark, dismal cell.⁷ The stench of death was nauseating. Low, agonized groans of pain from nearby cells identified his surviving crew—they were not many. Orlando tried to stand, but his throbbing legs would not support him.

"Rest my son, you are still weak."

Orlando giddily turned to face the unseen speaker, fumbling for his sword—it was gone! An old man stood behind him, eyes as black as the void. Cocking his head slightly, the stranger smiled a little, as if amused. His voice was strange, almost lifeless.

"Do not worry, I mean no harm. I too am a prisoner here. Forgive me for startling you." The man placed a cool hand upon Orlando's forehead, muttering something under his breath. Warmth and vigor flowed through his hand into Orlando—he felt refreshed, healthy even.

"You are a priest?"

"Yes, my son. I am Feldar, of Ptah. Drink this. It will help." He held out a half-full waterskin. Orlando stood, took a swig, and spluttered as the powerful brandy burned inside him.

There was a pause before Orlando spoke again. "How long have you been here? What do they want with us?"

"I do not know, my son. These neogi are attacking all ships within range. I fear they wish to provoke the elves into another war. I suspect they will want to interrogate you."⁸

Orlando shuddered. He had heard many tales of those "questioned" by the neogi losing their limbs, eyes, nose, or ears to the vile creatures. His throat tightened as fear gripped him. Something approached the cell. Striding clumsily down the corridor was the dark form of an umber hulk, a neogi cradled in its arms. The pair stopped outside one of the cells opposite his own. The hulk bellowed a deep growl, and Orlando saw Alvirath—his wife—scrambling to her feet in the feeble light.

"Ga'kah'ki'zid am I," hissed the foul neogi. It paused, as if it expected the poor elf to be impressed. "Priest of Thrig'ki I am. Master hungers for meat. Meat with me will now come to Overmaster."⁹



There was a sharp creak as the hulk heaved open the massive cell door, and a cry of pain as the lumbering monstrosity grabbed Alvirath by her silver hair and pulled her from the cell. Protesting frantically, Alvirath was roughly shoved along the corridor. She beat her fists against the hulk's stony chest, but it ignored her angry blows.

Frustration and anger welled inside Orlando. "No!" he shouted, reaching through the bars in a vain attempt to save the elf, "You can't do that to her!"

Ponderously, the hulk turned about, clacking its huge jaws. From its cradle in its lord-servant's arms the neogi grinned a cruel, toothy smile. "Want you to come too?" it snickered gleefully. "Master-lord pleased to meet this Meat will be."

On command, the hulk lurched forward and unbolted Orlando's cell door. Rudely seizing Orlando by the neck, the huge hulk pushed the two prisoners in front of it. Feldar shook his head in despair as the cell door slammed, hoping Orlando's death would be a quick one.

Perched atop the hulk's massive head, the neogi flexed its legs eagerly, anticipating a great feast for its Overmaster. The loathsome creature's eyes glittered evilly in the dim light. Orlando struggled in vain to escape the iron grip of the hulk, but his neck was just squeezed more tightly. He reached across the hulk's broad chest, to touch Alvirath. Mute with fear, she could not speak, but her eyes said farewell.

The party left the cell block and stumbled along a narrow corridor deeper into the ship. The air became putrid and uncomfortably warm as the group emerged into a low-ceilinged hall. A set of double doors filled the south wall of the room. Orlando guessed from the two hulk guards on either side of the doors that whatever was inside was important.

Their neogi captor, from its vantage point on the hulk's head spoke again. "Now to meet Broodmaster we go." On a sharp command the hulks heaved open the huge doors. The fetid odor of stale air and

Neogi statistics modifiers

Statistic	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Modifier	- 3	+1	0	+2	0	0(-15 to humanoids)

Neogi aging modifiers

Category	Mature	Old	Venerable
Age	2 months	15 years	30 years
Penalties	0	Str -1, Dex -1	Str -1, Dex -1, Con -1

Neogi level limits

Class	Mage	Specialist wizard	Priest
Level	12	12	12



death washed over Orlando. His stomach lurched.

Slowly and deliberately, their hulk captor dragged them forward, its colossal strength no match for two elves. The neogi on the hulk's head danced with a bloodthirsty furor, its sharp talons clattering on its lord-servant's iron-hard skin.

The stench worsened as they advanced into the huge room. Orlando could now see that the floor in the center had been cut away, revealing a gaping pit below into the cargo hold. His heart clenched in horror as he saw movement in the darkness below. Something huge twitched, glistening in the dim light with thick slime. A great watery eye appeared in the mountain of rotting flesh, its hideous gaze washing over the group. Another eye flicked open, and with a rumble, a cavernous mouth widened. Wickedly-sharp teeth gleamed as a deep bellow erupted from the monster.

There was movement across the room, and from the shadows scuttled more of the foul neogi. Hissing and spitting they advanced, circling the pit. The two captives stood inches from the edge of the chasm, still held firm by the hulk. From the pit the massive beast rose, squelching and growling hungrily. A humanoid creature across the pit caught Orlando's eye. His squinted to make out its form.

Greetings and *farewell*. The voice slithered through Orlando's mind as he strained to see. Sibilant and cool, it was quickly evaporated by the heat of Orlando's rage. An illithid! He had always suspected the slimy devils worked with the neogi, and here was proof.¹⁰ Struggling with renewed vigor, he tried desperately to escape from the grasp of the hulk.

Escape is *futile*. Orlando felt his muscles suddenly seize up, and an agony of cramps shot through his body. He knew Alvirath felt the same pain. Mentally cursing all illithids, Orlando prayed to the eleven gods to save him.

They cannot hear you out here. The illithid seemed amused by Orlando's futile efforts.

"The time of the broodmaster is nearing! Slake its thirst for meat we shall now! For

the glory of Thrig'ki!" the small neogi screamed, spittle flying from the corners of its mouth. The hulk moved to throw Alvirath over the precipice.

"The glory of P'kk!" another of the small creatures shrieked. "The glory of T'zen'kill!"

"All the Holy Ones glory have!"

A sudden explosion rocked the ship, and searing flames erupted across the chamber. Terrified by the intense fire, the neogi scattered, screaming. The hulk holding Alvirath and Orlando reflexively shuffled backward, away from the pit, dragging its prisoners with it.

Orlando's fear and anger forced the illithid from his mind as he struggled against the iron grasp of the hulk. With grim satisfaction he noted the mind flayer's robe was burning, and he felt its shrill mental screeches of pain.

The far wall of the room suddenly collapsed, pierced by the barrel of a massive gun. The thunderous force of the ram threw Orlando and the hulks to the floor. Through the breach swarmed giff marines, brandishing cutlass, pistol, and all manner of outlandish weapons. The hulk holding the elves cropped his captives to enter the fray. Striking his head on the deck, Orlando once again fell into unconsciousness. Alvirath's tears splashed warm on his cheek as she kneeled next to him.

Below them the broodmaster was

afame, cracks opening in its warty sides. Young neogi erupted from its decaying flesh, spilling across the floorboards.¹¹

Footnotes

Neogi look like a foul cross between a spider and a moray eel, and are about the size of a small dog. All neogi and their slaves are tattooed; the garish and intricate patterns announce name, age, number of slaves owned, and social status. Neogi are covered in coarse brown hair, which is frequently dyed bright colors as a status symbol. Their eight spidery legs are long and thin with sharp nails and flexible joints. Their heads are those of serpents or eels, with two forward-facing eyes and a mouth of sharp teeth for rending flesh. More information on neogi may be found in the *Lorebook of the Void* from the original SPELLJAMMER® campaign boxed set. They also appear in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ hardcover book.

1. The names of neogi ships show little imagination. Most involve the words "slave," "blood," "death," or "pain." Neogi ships tend to be painted red, black, orange, or purple with silver and gold highlights also being popular.

2. Neogi brutality is legendary, for they have no morals and less sympathy. Weak or injured neogi are killed and devoured. All slaves are eventually eaten, except the umber hulks that are too valuable. Any

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who surrender to the neogi are enslaved or placed in a lifejammer helm. Any slave refuses to or is incapable of working is eaten. Kender, halflings, and gnomes are not valued slaves because of their irritating habits; they are usually just tortured and eaten. Most other races are considered prime slave material, especially humans, elves and ogres.

3. Each mature neogi has an umber hulk slave, valued as its most treasured possession. Most neogi insist upon being carried everywhere by their hulks since they themselves can scuttle around only slowly. Powerful neogi own two or more hulks.

The neogi have an overdeveloped concept of ownership—everything is the property of a neogi. They consider themselves the supreme race in the universe and therefore own everything in it. This superiority complex leads to the strange titles they use: umber hulks are called “lord-servants,” other neogi “kinsmen-slaves,” the ship’s master “captain-owner,” and all others are “servant-slaves” or simply “meat.”

4. Roughly one in 10 neogi has magical ability as a wizard of levels 1-8. Some neogi have aptitude enough to rise to 14th level, and rumors persist of magic-using neogi liches. Specialist neogi mages may choose between the schools of Necromancy, Conjunction/Summoning or Invocation/Evocation; other schools are unavailable or

considered too weak to be of consequence. The foul creatures have developed many new spells of their own (see DRAGON® issue #184’s article, “Magic with an Evil Bite” by Jason M. Walker for examples).

Neogi speaking human tongues over-emphasize the letters s, z, and k, making their voice sound harsh and guttural. *K’azz’jak’n*, the neogi language, is reminiscent of snakes hissing and the whirring of thri-kreen. The structure and word order of the neogi tongue is very complex, but when speaking Common neogi do not bother with grammar.

5. Neogi possess a poisonous *slowing* bite that they use infrequently, because they must be close to their victim to administer the poison. The cowardly neogi are reluctant to place themselves in danger for the goods of others, preferring instead to send their slaves into combat.

This *slowing* poison also acts as a *charm* agent when administered over an extended period of time, helping to brainwash the slaves so they will not rebel. The effects are hard to reverse, requiring dispel *magic* and *neutralize poison* spells.

6. UMBER hulks are trained to loot ships, and they enjoy this task immensely. They can recognize valuable metals, gemstones, and weapons, and usually can locate spelljamming helms. Food and drink often is devoured on the spot, as are any dead defenders.

When an enemy vessel has been stripped, neogi always leave the shell behind as a warning to other spacefarers—who can recognize the work of the neogi from its sheer brutality.

7. Neogi eyes are sensitive to light. Although bright light causes them no harm, neogi prefer to keep their ships in dismal darkness. They possess infravision to a 60’ range. Neogi are not clean creatures, and the filth and smell of their quarters aboard their ships is quite nauseating. DMs should feel free to impose Constitution checks the first PCs encounter the stench.

8. Neogi torture methods are the stuff of fearsome tales. The pain that victims are forced to endure is hideous enough to make human torturers’ stomachs turn. Neogi eat flesh, preferably alive and screaming, be it human, neogi, or illithid. Their normal diet is one pound of meat per day, although neogi may live without food for up to two weeks. Torture is their favorite method of “preparing” it.

9. One in 20 neogi has priestly abilities, and each spelljamming vessel is overseen by at least one priest. Priests are permitted to add the word *ki’zid* after their name, meaning “favored of deities.” The Powers of the neogi are referred to as “deity” and not “god” or “goddess,” as there is no distinction between male or female amongst the sexless neogi. Deities are viewed as servants by the insolent neogi, who continually demand favor and good fortune. Neogi never pray, and rarely offer sacrifice, since they see themselves as more important.

Pronouncing the name of a neogi deity incorrectly is an invitation to be killed slowly and painfully. Humans, who tend to find neogi pronunciation difficult, are advised not to attempt saying deities’ names. There are five neogi deities:

Thrig’ki (lesser power), Align: NE, Plane: Karish (Abyss), Portfolio: “love” (envy/jealousy)

Although the deity of “love,” *Thrig* is better translated as jealousy or hatred. To neogi, jealousy and love are the same. Thrig’ki appears as a neogi with writhing snakes for hair and twelve spidery legs.

P’kk (lesser power), Alignment: LE, Plane: Ki’pik (Baator), Portfolio: fear, tyranny.

P’kk is the favorite deity of captains and neogi in positions of power who enjoy bullying and manipulating their lessers. P’kk is seen as an umber hulk with the head of a neogi.

T’zen’kil (lesser power, Alignment: NE, Plane: Karish, Portfolio: torture, pain, suffering).

The name of T’zen’kil is invoked by neogi torturers and those in charge of the slave pens. Worshipers are tattooed with grotesque black symbols of pain. T’zen’kil looks like a black neogi with a whip for a tongue.

Kr’tx (lesser power), Alignment: CE, Plane: Jik’qu (Gray Waste), Portfolio: war, brutality, strength.

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Kr'tx is the neogi deity favored by umber hulk slaves, who delight in brutality and wanton destruction. The favor of Kr'tx is always demanded before a major battle. Kr'tx is seen as a red neogi with continually burning claws and hair.

Kil'lix (lesser power), Align: LE, Plane: Karish, Portfolio: death, murder, poison.

Kil'lix is the patron of murderers and assassins in the neogi world, and is seen as the darkest of shadows. Its horrid laugh is high-pitched and whining, yet also deep and booming, and is said to be heard by those who are about to die.

All neogi priests gain access to the same spheres of spells. **Major access:** All, Astral, Charm, Combat, Elemental, Healing (reversed only), Necromantic, War. **Minor access:** Protection, Summoning.

10. The neogi have no allies except for corrupt mind flayers, and this alliance is tenuous at best. Even the foul drow loathe the neogi, branding them blasphemers against their Spider-Queen Lolth. Illithids work for large profits as intermediaries between the neogi and the Arcane, who are unwilling to deal with the neogi directly.

11. Neogi reproduce asexually by poisoning old, frail captain-owners with a variety of toxic chemicals. The victims rapidly collapse into coma, and slowly expand into Great Old Masters" or "Broodmasters."

These foul creatures grow fat on the flesh of slaves, all the while being eaten from the inside by developing young neogi. When broodmasters near the Time, their flesh begins to split. In a final ritual they burst, spilling out live young neogi. The young fight over the remains of the broodmaster until it has been devoured, then attack each other. From a litter of forty, only six or seven will survive, but these will be the toughest, most brutal neogi of the group. Natural selection therefore helps the race to remain powerful.

This violent reproductive process has a number of repercussions on the race. Neogi are sexless, and they cannot understand the concept of gender or love in other races. Many consider human women to be a different race from human men. The viciousness of their early lives leads their evil and hateful natures. Dominant neogi emotions are hatred, jealousy and fear, and it is these which keep lesser neogi in place under their masters.

Captain-owners become broodmasters when their underlings grow tired of senile rulership. If left to live their full lifespan, neogi die at about age 45, but most are assassinated before they reach 30.

The only neogi fable of interest to sages details the neogi creation myth. Their legends claim the universe was created by a Being named Ka'jik'zxi. This deity con-

structed the Planes, Spheres, Flow, and the planets. Finally it created five more deities, each like itself only weaker. The five, named Thrig'ki, P'kk, T'zen'kil, Kr'tx and Kil'lix, each represent one of the desirable aspects of the neogi race. These deities squabbled over their areas of control until Ka'jik'zxi grew tired of their bickering and punished them. Furious, the five hatched a plot to kill Ka'jik'zxi. Concocting a fatal brew with the "foulest ingredients" (including friendship, mercy, and compassion) they poisoned their Creator.

Ka'jik'zxi swelled up to a huge size, and the young deities hid, fearful of Ka'jik'zxi's wrath. Suddenly, Ka'jik'zxi burst, spilling its entrails across the spheres. Some landed in the Outer Planes—the parts containing mercy and compassion became the gods of good. Some of Ka'jik'zxi landed in the Lower Planes and became the evil gods. Ka'jik'zxi's brain landed in a forgotten Crystal Sphere.

After much searching, the neogi deities found the brain. There they were amazed to discover life—the first neogi had been "born." The deities taught the neogi of the multiverse and their destiny to conquer. The neogi built ships and left their homeworld—referred to in legends as Ka'jk'z. They have never returned, but the neogi know their mission: to conquer all the Spheres.

Ω

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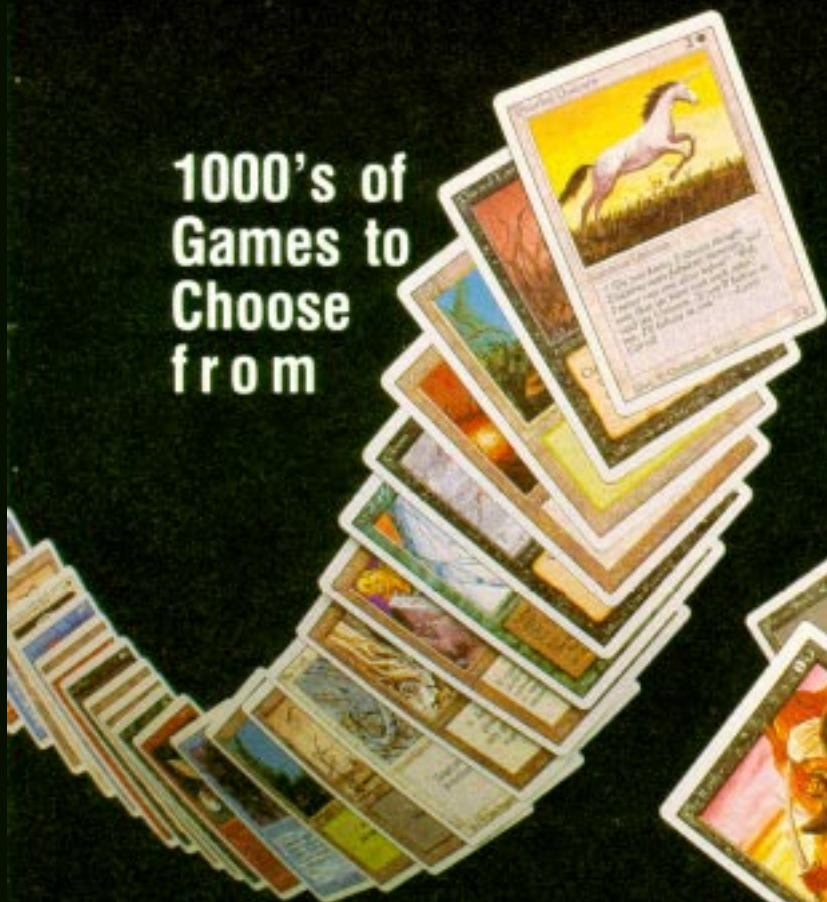
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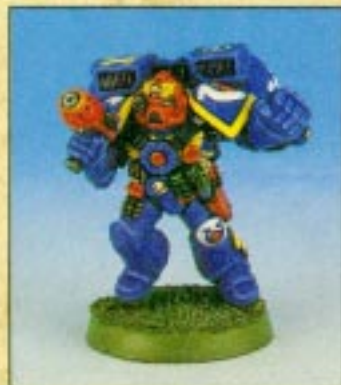
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In search of cosmic balance



[Editor's Note: Due to circumstances beyond everyone's control, this issue's Eye installment is not by that stalwart trio of gaming gods: Zeb Cook, Paul Murphy, and Ken Rolston. Instead, we welcome one of our RPG reviewers, Lester "Multimedia" Smith to a new section of the magazine. Les chose to share his own thoughts on a computer game reviewed in a previous issue of DRAGON® Magazine. Always one to support intelligent discussions of differing viewpoints (and not being above tossing a little controversy into these pages now and then), I hope you'll enjoy reading Les' opinions. —Dale]

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It isn't often in life that you get a chance to atone for an earlier mistake. But here, due to an unusual set of circumstances, I find myself filling in for the regular stable of computer-game reviewers this month, and it provides me with a rare opportunity to make amends for what I consider an old error on my part, at least in a strange sort of cosmic sense, while addressing a new one.

Allow me to explain.

Years ago, when Games Workshop first released the SPACE HULK® board game, I snatched up a copy eagerly. I already had become addicted to Leading Edge's ALIENS® solitaire board game, and the SPACE HULK game promised to deliver the same sort of action, but for two players rather than one—and with GW's characteristically glitzy components. The game turned out to be even more impressive than I anticipated. Its mechanics are simple yet elegant. The time limit on the marine player's turn is a stroke of genius. And the balance of genestealer advantages (their rapid movement, the use of "blips" to represent uncertain numbers of them outside of marine line of sight, and their deadliness in hand-to-hand combat, for instance) versus marine advantages (ranged weapons with unlimited range and ammunition, and randomly drawn "command points" each turn to allow a few extra actions) is excellent. Finally, the different scenarios provided call for variations in tactics,

keeping the game fresh play after play, while also pointing up the option of creating your own unique missions.

But early in my experience with the game, I began thinking that it wasn't quite even-handed in its treatment of marines and genestealers, and I wrote an article for GDW's CHALLENGE® Magazine, suggesting ways to give the marines a better chance of standing up to the alien monsters. It didn't take long for letters to start arriving at the magazine's office in response, defending the game's balance, and chastising me for blaming the game for my failures as a marine player. And after gaining a bit more familiarity with the game, I had to admit that they were right.

Now, years later, I find myself strangely mirroring that situation. The reputation of the computer version of the SPACE HULK® game has been sullied (as I sullied that of the board game) in the very pages of DRAGON Magazine—see the *Eye of the Monitor* in issue #213 by Jay and Dee—and I'm here to set the record straight. (With my karmic balance thus restored, perhaps I'll be able to sleep at night once again.)

In their review, Jay and Dee had several complaints about the game. I'll address those complaints one by one, pretty much in the order Jay and Dee presented them.

First, they say that the computer game tries to recreate the board game's mix of "timed turns combined with the ability to interrupt your opponent's turns," but that it fails. I couldn't disagree more. To me, the most impressive thing about the computer version is that it doesn't try to mimic these aspects of the board game, but rather seeks to convey the bug-hunting experience on its own merits, using the

computer's strengths. Instead of having a timed turn, the marine player has "real time" action at a one-to-one ratio, interrupted at will by a limited supply of "freeze time," which halts the action completely while the marines' HUDs (Heads-Up Displays) are checked or a top-down view of the overall area is consulted. The trick in succeeding at the computer version lies in using both of these views to best effect.

But Jay and Dee complain that the HUD view gives too many things to watch at once. In response, I'll repeat: the judicious use of freeze time allows breathing space while HUDs are checked. Also, it is no accident that the game distinguishes between the large display of the primary marine and the smaller ones of his four squadmates. Left-clicking the mouse on any of the smaller screens simply causes that marine to fire his weapon straight ahead at waist level. But the cursor can be aimed in the primary marine's display, allowing more accurate shots (even into the mouths of side halls); moving it to the very edges of the display and left-clicking allows single-step movement commands; and right-clicking picks up items and opens and closes doors. Given this set-up, an important strategy in the game is to choose as primary the most important marine for a scenario—a flamer for "cleansing" missions, for instance—and control him carefully while scanning the smaller screens for trouble as those marines follow longer orders given during freeze time in the overhead view.

Next, Dee and Jay complain that the marines are really dumb in the computer game, and the truth is that they are prone to get into "traffic jams" when given orders to all move through the same inter-

section at once from different directions, for example. But the solution to this is simple: Give them commands in smaller bits. Have one marine move to the edge of the intersection and stop there while the others move through. While he is waiting, have him provide covering fire for them. After all, the whole point of squad-level action is summed up in "move and cover." That is, infantry squads in real life are taught to "leap-frog" toward their objective, one squad taking up a covering position while the other moves forward, then the other providing covering fire while the first advances, and so on. That is exactly the sort of thing the SPACE HULK computer game encourages. In general, the best way to lose a mission in the game is to get impatient and give the marines commands to move too far at once. Shorter moves allow the player to better react to genestealer actions.

As Dee and Jay point out, it is really painful to run out of freeze time and be stuck running the marines in real time. But they go on to say that generally freeze time accrues more rapidly than is actually necessary. From my own play, I have noticed that typically it is at the beginning of a scenario that I feel the most time pressure, while trying to get orders to all the marines before the genestealers run rampant. Once the squad is up and running, it

is fairly easy to freeze things just long enough to update one or two marines' orders at a time. But even when time is pressed, there are a couple of ways of "cheating" the genestealers. For one thing, a simple shift-left-click on a marine automatically duplicates the orders of the marine currently selected, allowing the player to give a complex set of orders to several marines simultaneously within bare seconds. For another, it is possible to give a marine at the rear of the formation a huge movement order, knowing that he can't complete it until the others get out of his way. That saves time early on, because the blocking marines can be closely monitored and moved a bit at a time, with the rear marine consequently following automatically each time they advance.

In other words, this isn't an arcade game: you have to use some cleverness and planning if you want your marines to survive and beat the genestealers. In this, it parallels the board game, which also requires planning and cleverness from the marine player who wants to succeed—that and cool-headedness, which is of great use in both the board and computer games.

One of my strongest contentions about the review, however, is that Jay and Dee intimate that after losing a SPACE HULK computer game mission, it requires some sort of elaborate sequence of commands to begin the scenario again, unlike the DOOM* game, which automatically resurrects you. All you have to do when the "failed mission" screen comes up is right-click to get right back into the scenario. Like the DOOM game, the SPACE HULK game starts you at the beginning of that mission again. Following this, they comment that there is little reason to play in the HUD view, given that the overhead perspective gives a better view of where everyone is. And then they complain that any artifacts can't be seen in the overhead view. The fact is, there are several reasons for using the HUD view. One thing is the aforementioned ability to aim fire for the primary marine. Also, it is much easier to take reactive actions in the HUD view, such as firing a flamer at an approaching 'stealer. (And given that—just as in the board game—sometimes 'stealers survive a first spray of flame, it can be critical to see that in HUD view and trigger the flamer again.) Only in the HUD view can you readily move a marine step by step, which can be essential at times. More than once, I've had to back a marine rapidly to keep him out of the claws of an advancing 'stealer long enough for his gun to unjam. As a matter of fact, you can't see the "jammed" indicator in the top-down view. Given all this, it is better to play the game as it was designed to be used, switching back and forth between top-down and HUD views as necessary.

Next, the reviewers say that they got a result of "mission failure" even though they thought they had fulfilled the mission

requirements, and they dicker back and forth as to whether Dee dropped the artifact or not. I'll admit to having had a similar confusion in one mission: I thought I had to pick up an artifact, but it turns out that one of the marines begins the mission carrying it. There is an icon to indicate this in the HUD view; I just hadn't noticed it in my rush to begin playing that scenario. A second look cleared up the problem entirely.

Finally, Jay says that he doesn't want to keep playing a mission over and over until he's found out exactly where the monsters are. But that complaint is more applicable to the DOOM game (which he obviously likes) than to the SPACE HULK game. From my play of both games, it seems that in the SPACE HULK game there is considerable randomness as to where the genestealers appear and how many do. Like the board-game version, I could never quite be sure how much time I had before running into them, and how many there would be when I did. It seemed to change from play to play even within the same mission.

Overall, then, I don't think Dee and Jay give the SPACE HULK computer game a fair shake. As to their complaint that the sound made the program crash, my own experience has been primarily with sound through the PC speaker, and the program has never crashed on me. What little play I've done of it on a system with a SOUND-BLASTER* card also was trouble-free (and the sound was impressive).

Obviously, I'm quite happy with the SPACE HULK computer game. I've found that different missions require different strategies: Some I've won only by cautious advances with lots of covering fire, and others have required an all-out run for the objective. One of the most satisfying things about the game for me has been that even after winning a mission, I want to come back to it later and see if I can do even better at it (getting out with more marines alive, for example). Add to this the fact that there are multitudinous individual missions to play, including the campaign level, and the result is lots and lots of play time from this product. And it is easy enough to pick up that you can leave it for a few weeks and come back without having to learn the interface all over again. What's more, the game is just old enough that you can most likely find it marked down in price nowadays. (I bought my copy recently at an *Electronics Boutique* store for only \$9.99!) As an aside, another mark of its age is that it is obviously designed for the 386. While it runs smoothly on faster machines, the mouth of the marine who briefs you before each mission moves at a near blur on them.

For die-hard SPACE HULK board-game fans, in particular, this computer game is virtually a necessity. I rate it a 5 out of 5.

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HTSR



The Game Wizards

Solitaire SPELLFIRE™ game rules

by Bruce Nesmith

So you've built the world's finest SPELLFIRE deck and you want to test it out. (For those of you who've been reading my other articles, my Speed deck was eventually and convincingly beaten.) Your problem is that you can't get find anyone to play with just now. The solution? Solitaire SPELLFIRE game rules!

Playing the SPELLFIRE game solitaire is a great way to test out a deck. It's also a lot more fun than a regular game of solitaire. Having a need to test out many of my own decks, I have come up with some solitaire SPELLFIRE game rules.

Solitaire SPELLFIRE games are played against an imaginary opponent. The cards themselves work just like they do in any other game. However, rules are needed to direct the play of the imaginary opponent.

Only one deck is needed to play the SPELLFIRE game solitaire. You will be laying out realms normally, but the imaginary opponent will not. He has no realms of his own. He attacks your realms and razes them. You attack your own razed realms, which he defends. If your attack is successful, the realm is rebuilt. It is possible to affect two realms in the same turn. You can lay down a new realm and regain a razed one during combat, all in one turn.

The game is over when you run out of cards in your deck. You can keep playing until you are out of options, but you may not reshuffle the discard pile. Since both you and your imaginary opponent are drawing from the same deck, the game will be shorter than you might think. Most of the games I tried ran about 15 minutes. All of the other basic game rules are identical to those in the SPELLFIRE rules booklet.

Solitaire rules

1. The imaginary opponent always draws her cards one at a time, not in a group. The order in which they are drawn can effect how they are played.

2. Her realm cards and holding cards are discarded immediately. If your deck has fewer than 10 realms, adjust the victory conditions to four unrazed realms.

3. Event cards are played as soon as they

are drawn, unless the card itself indicates otherwise. In that case, the event is played as soon as possible. For example, Calm events must wait until you throw a harmful event and The Caravans event must wait for the end of the imaginary opponent's turn. Events that are useless to her, such as Labor of Legend, are discarded immediately.

4. The imaginary opponent always puts all her champions in her pool during step 2 of her turn. I recommend you put her pool of champions to the left of the realm formation and yours on the right.

5. When she draws a magical items, she places it on the champion with the fewest magical items in her pool. In the case of ties, see the rule below. A magical item is never placed on a champion that already has that exact same power. For example, a Viper Hand that allows the champion to cast wizard spells is never placed on a champion that can cast wizard spells.

6. Artifacts also are attached to champions as soon as they are drawn. However, some artifacts will have to wait until a champion of the proper world is available

7. Spells castable before and after combat (steps 3 and 5) must be cast the same turn they are drawn. If they cannot be cast that turn, they are cast on the first turn they can. For example, if the imaginary opponent does not have a wizard in her pool, she may have to hold her step 3 spells until she draws the right champion.

8. The imaginary opponent must attack each turn. She always attacks first with the champion that has the highest overall level. In case of ties, see the rule below. She always attacks the foremost exposed realm, even with flyers, which it is legal for her to attack. For realms in the same row, see the rule below. If the imaginary opponent razes a realm, she gets spoils of victory.

9. The highest level spells and allies are played first. In case of ties, see the rule below. Spells that have no effect due to events, realm powers, champion powers, etc., are never cast. Your imaginary opponent isn't stupid, just mechanical.

10. The imaginary opponent defends razed realms using the same rules she uses to attack. If she defeats one of your champions, she gets spoils of victory.

Rule of ties

The imaginary opponent always uses the highest level card first. However, it is easy to have two cards with the same level to choose from. All ties are resolved by card number. Lower numbered cards are chosen first. When dealing with booster sets, cards are chosen in order of publication first, then by card number.

Order of Publication for 1994:

Original set of 420
Original chase cards 1-25
RAVENLOFT® booster cards 1-100
DRAGONLANCE® booster cards 1-100
DRAGONLANCE chase cards 1-25
FORGOTTEN REALMS® booster cards 1-100
FORGOTTEN REALMS chase cards 1-25

Rule of selection

Many cards require the player to pick a champion, realm, magical item, etc. If the imaginary opponent is required to pick, she always chooses the highest level card. In the case of ties, see the rule above.

Random draws: Some cards will require you to draw randomly from the imaginary opponent's hand, or for her to draw from yours. For such random draws, turn the cards face down and shuffle them, then draw the appropriate number of cards.

Like any solitaire game, winning a solitaire SPELLFIRE game is tough. To completely win, you must have six unrazed realms on the table. Most of the time you will not win. I score most games by how many unrazed realms I have when I run out of cards in my draw pile. A score of zero or one is pathetic. Having two or three realms unrazed is average. Managing to keep four or five realms unrazed is a good game.

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I'm writing in response to the letters of Vincent Nasso and Talus London Young, which were featured in the "Forum" section of DRAGON issue #195. I have been playing a multi-classed character in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game for the last two and a half years. In the current campaign, my PC is the oldest surviving member of the party. The other current members are an 11th-level wizard, a dual-classed 6th-level cleric/9th-level psionicist, a 12th-level paladin, an 11th-level fighter, and an 11th-level cleric. My character is a 10th-level mage/9th-level fighter.

When I joined the campaign it was my style to keep the details of my character relatively secret, playing my character as somebody who prided himself on being a "Renaissance man." The response of my fellow gamers was along the lines of, "Boy, your character sure kicks butt."

As time has progressed, this attitude has changed to "Boy, whatever happened to your character, he's just not as tough as he used to be." The simple truth of the matter is that at lower levels, multi-classed characters are superbly versatile. At higher levels, their advancement slows down such that they remain versatile but their level of expertise in each field is not as good as a single-classed character. Whilst in a one-on-one fight with another member of my group, I have a distinct advantage and I would probably easily beat all but the fighter and the paladin, in an adventuring situation, my character is the rear-guard man. Due to my halved **XP** rate, I will never be as good a wizard as the other mage, and I will never be as good a warrior as the paladin or the fighter. Aside from this lack of advancement at

higher levels, I also have a severe hit-point deficit, due to my halved hit-point total.

My 64, as opposed to our fighter's 110, doesn't last long if I'm not wearing armor. (It's not allowed if you wish to cast spells.)

My point is that if the correct rules are followed in the construction of a multi-classed character, then the character will be balanced. In the short term, they are versatile front-line characters; in the long term, they are versatile back-up men, who complement other, single-classed characters and are invaluable when a fighter goes down or a mage is *feeble-minded*. I chose my character not because I'm a role-playing megalomaniac, but because I wanted him to be something of a "jack-of-all-trades, master of none," and I didn't particularly care for a bard character. I'm certain there are multitudes of other players just like me. I think it's about as fair for a DM to say, "You can't play multi-classed characters in my campaign because in my opinion they're not balanced," as it is for a basketball referee to suddenly allow players to run into each other, because he personally likes the idea.

I think that if you play a multi-classed character for an extended period, you'll find that they are balanced. It's unfair to place 10% ability failure checks on a character who trains for twice as long as a single class to get to a certain level. I think it's a good idea to have high-level, expensive tutors for a character, and I think it's a good idea to have enemy NPC multi-classed characters (my campaign nemesis is a drow 12th-level mage/11th-level fighter). If I sound a bit harsh in what I say, then I apologize, but in my opinion, a lot of people play RPGs to do something that they can't do in real life. If they wish to play multi-classed characters, let them. In the long term, if you stick to the proper rules, you'll find that they're a properly balanced character class anyway.

Paul Morgan
Brisbane, Australia

I want to respond to Adam Panshin's letter in "Forum" in issue #207; specifically his suggestion for dealing with multi-classed characters. I have seen two ways of handling this in action, and both work.

The first method is to treat the character as a, say, FighterMage (or fighter-mage), rather than as a fighter/mage. This is done by adding the experience points needed for the next level together, and requiring that total as the number needed to advance. The PC is called a 3rd-level fighter-mage, rather than a 3rd-level

fighter/3rd-level mage. Hit points are rolled for each class, then averaged.

The second method starts by abandoning the XP-for-gp method for all PCs, and figuring experience based on what the character actually did. If this method is in use, it is fairly easy to divide a multi-classed character's experience points according to how much the abilities of each class were used. For instance, a fighter/mage who cast no spells throughout a particular adventure would get no experience points added to the mage XP amount—they'd all go to improve the fighter side of things. On advancing a level in either class, hit points are half of what they'd be for a single-classed character.

I am deliberately leaving these descriptions rather sketchy, as all DMs will have to adapt these ideas to their own campaign. I think, however, that either method could prove useful.

Christopher Davis
Snoqualmie WA

I would like to respond to a letter published in issue #195's "Letters" written by a "Good old Mom, who is sometimes allowed to play." The writer wanted to hear from us misfits.

I'm a 16-year-old guy and I've been playing the AD&D game and several other role-playing games for about four years. Most of my characters have had mostly low or average ability scores and I've had lots of fun playing them nevertheless. Unless I'm completely wrong, role-playing is a bit like acting—you have to try to become the character, not make the character into a copy of yourself.

One of my characters was a gnome illusionist with an Intelligence of 10 and a Dexterity score of 16. The rest of the ability scores were 10 or under, and I still reached 3rd level with him. He survived because I used my wits, not some rolled-up stats. So all you role-players out there, even if your character seems to be a loser at first, don't throw her away. Try to identify with her and you'll see that she is a lot more interesting to play than all those supermen you've created so far.

Jarmo Gunn
Helsinki, Finland

Is it just my campaign, or has everyone jumped on the bandwagon of the drow? As soon as one of our players brought home the *Drow of the Underdark*, everyone went out and made drow characters

(except me). Our new group didn't even play in the Underdark, we were full on the surface. Did R. A. Salvatore put subliminal messages in his novels to worship drow? Of course, everyone has become power-hungry megalomaniacs. Are there any campaigns that don't have this problem? There are no other DMs in my area.

Am I the only gamer who believes powerful monsters and races should stay in the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessory? In my area, I'm the only person who hasn't had at least one drow character. I think that if they made a *Complete Tarrasque Handbook* everyone would flock to the opportunity to have one of them as a character. Please print my address so that I may hear the horror stories from other gamers.

John Morris, Jr.
93 Roosevelt Ave.
Erial NJ 08081

In some issues, the Forum has been largely concerned with "power gamers," those who destroy fun by comparing statistics fanatically, and attempting to "defeat" other players by being as dominating and stubborn as possible. Needless to say, these "characters" have no character.

I have dealt with them many times, and have found numerous ways to make life more difficult for them. I hope these methods will work for you, too.

For those having trouble with players who cannot grasp the idea of a character being anything more than a page of statistics: take away those statistics. Remove all essential components from your system (stats, bonuses, skills, numbers . . . all that "power gamers" hold dear). Simply play a complete game without any rules. It can be done! Most players enjoy such freeform role-playing, and GMs get quite a workout for improvisation. If this seems too drastic or chaotic, then use a ridiculously easy system (Gamescience's TWERPS* multi-genre game seems to work well) and keep your current setting in place. Only use this as long as you have to, for players eventually will become sick of it. Other times are appropriate for this as well, such as when introducing a new player.

If you don't like the idea of leaving your current game system, even temporarily, then introduce a few subtle changes. Try eliminating the entire concept of professions and character classes. WotC's ARS MAGICA* game gives great advice for this, as does the CHARACTER LAW* & CAMPAIGN LAW* component to ICE'S ROLE-MASTER* system. When character classes are eliminated, stereotypes are as well, allowing individuality.

If your players are the type who try to dominate the game and "steal" the action, gently embarrass them. I do this by bringing in a "babysitter" NPC that exists only to save the life of that character. It is quite a humbling experience.

Finally, a reminder for those who have

players that they consider unmotivated. Game masters are often critical of players, when the blame should be placed on them. Making the game interesting is a primary responsibility on the part of the GM, and bored players are often the result of a "dry" game. Don't be too hard on players that you feel aren't playing up to code. Be sure that the player is causing a problem before criticizing their role-playing style.

Phillip Dale
Farmland IN

I write this letter in reply to Bryan Fairfield (issue #195) and many others like him. Bryan was complaining about how, with the large range of AD&D game player handbooks, it made it very easy to create super-powered characters.

The simplest answer I have for him is: So? Honestly, what is the fun playing a character that can do everything and has no flaws? In nearly all role-playing systems, overpowered characters can easily be manufactured, from the "half-elf fighterblades" in Bryan's letter to the grizzly old cyberpunk vets of the 2020s.

I, being in the majority of gamers, have played such characters; usually as a raw recruit, looking for the most powerful characters possible. But my most memorable characters have been flawed. Who can forget the pacifist fighter or my all-time favorite: Harvey Fat, the Middle-earth hobbit scout? It was with this vertically challenged individual that I became known as "Snake Eyes" Martin, the unluckiest gamer this side of the Atlantic.

But seriously, as a DM in the position of having a super character disrupting the balance of the game, I would take him aside and explain carefully why I thought it would be wrong to continue using that particular character. Of course, if he didn't heed the DM's kind advice, the aforementioned player could find himself ejected from the party and told to find himself a group of power gamers.

The answer is to find a balance between power and "role-ability." Hopefully the PCs can determine such a balance alone. But it occasionally needs the DM's gentle hand.

Thomas Martin
Roxburghshire, Scotland

I read with interest the letter in issue #195 from Bryan Fairfield on the subject of bard kits contained within the *Complete Bard's Handbook*. It strikes me that he may be missing the point slightly.

As a DM I do not make a player take a kit in any class, and I certainly do not choose a kit for every character that I play. After all, what are kits but a means to come closer to a character and thus be able to role-play her better? If the player is able to do this without the dubious benefit of a restricting kit, then full marks to them. The message I get from Mr. Fairfield is that he sees kits as a means to make his characters more powerful without needing to expend much effort

in making them so.

In the case of the *Complete Bard's Handbook*, I welcomed the publication, as I myself make my living in the field of entertainment, and it opened doors to my role-playing that I had scarcely even imagined. Even so, I did not, and even post-CBH, do not find the true bard a "boring" character class, as Mr. Fairfield seems to. He has his own share of abilities and skills that the other kits do not have access to, and can be equally exciting as the other kits if properly role-played—they only appear boring because of their familiarity, right from their fairly raw first appearance in the bard appendix in the first edition rule books. What you have to consider is the *personality*, not the powers, of the bard that set him aside from the other mortals on this earth—it is a difficult, frustrating, and often lonely path to tread.

My solutions to the problem of power gamers who would take a kit purely because of the abilities and powers of that character are fairly simple. A standard house rule in my game is that the multi-classed option is definitely not two separate classes combined in a single body. With a multi-classed character you **don't** keep separate track of THAC0s, saving throws, proficiencies and all the rest for each character, so why should the other skills be any different? Thus, similar skills, such as the case of the thief skills for the gypsy/thief and the spells for the loremaster/mage that Mr. Fairfield mentioned are gained only for the class that performs them the best, which in these cases are the thief and the mage.

A second solution is to impose penalties and difficulties to the character who does not correctly role-play the character he possesses. Obviously, the definition of correct role-playing will be different for every character, but as an example, bear in mind that most bards will not willingly leave their own performing arena, be it the animals in the forest or a packed theater in the center of the city of Greyhawk or Waterdeep. Almost all performing artists (I have observed this in others as well as myself) like to be seen, to be recognized and appreciated by their public, and it is unlikely they will embark on long wilderness treks that will affect their fluctuating reputation and ability to practice and hone their skills.

The most important thing to remember, however, is game balance. This is as much the job of the players as it is of the DM. Is it really realistic for every character to be some kind of bard, especially from arenas as diverse as blades, gallants, gypsies, and meistersingers? Also, such things as a *sword of dancing* being possessed at only 6th level are, to my mind, ridiculous. (I agree that the power of these items is immense in the hands of a bard, and all the more reason for the DM to watch where he gives one out.) As for druids

fighting to attain level advancement, I threw that one out as soon as I read it in the rule book.

Any kit, regardless of character profession, has the ability to unbalance the game. What must be remembered is that this is a role-playing game, not a power struggle to see who can kill the most orcs in a round. My message is to keep the kits—but just be careful that they are role-played well and realistically.

Andrew McLeish
Spalding, Lincolnshire, England

I write this in response to Bryan Fairfield's letter about half-elf bards in issue #195. Although using only the rules in *The Complete Bard's Handbook*, bards may seem unbeatable, there are many more "Special Hindrances" not covered. These are not represented by dice rolls, but mainly how people treat the character.

Imagine, for instance, that the fighter/blade you mentioned was staying and performing at the castle of a well-known and loved noble. If this noble was killed, the pressure would be on the local authorities to catch the killer quickly. If he was killed without a sound or trace, apparently by a skilled assassin, then the eye of suspicion would fall on the fighter/blade. This is not represented by any rules or dice rolls, but by the reaction of the NPCs.

Also, imagine how hard it could be for a well-known bard to simply walk down the street. People would pester him, bother him, and generally get in his way. Now imagine how hard it could be for him to flee from the local authorities down a busy street. Not only would people still pester and bother him, but his reputation would be destroyed. This, too, is not covered by any rules.

The life of a thief/gypsy would be difficult as well. Consider how suspicious people in the real world were of gypsies in the past. If something valuable was missing, you can guess who would be blamed. Or, think of how aggravating it would be for a jester to try to get anybody to take him seriously, even if he was warning the king of an assassination plot.

Aside from reactions of regular NPCs, another balance to gameplay is to enforce the rule of training. This is an effective balance to all powerful classes, including some of the kits in *The Complete Book of Elves*. Most bard colleges could effectively tutor standard bard kits, but where would a druid/meistersinger find a teacher? Experience points don't matter if you can't find a teacher to raise you to 2nd level. Even some of the more exotic single-classed bard kits, dwarf chanters, elfen minstrels, and even jongleurs might have trouble. The higher level that these characters get to, the harder it will be to find a teacher.

Gray Calhoun
Bryn Mawr PA
Ω

First Quest

Continued from page 8

There was the paladin, who claimed to have four abilities scores of 18, including an 18 Charisma (in my opinion he exhibited a Charisma of 3), a thief who didn't think romance had any place in an adventure, and a ranger who felt that children were a burden and nothing but trouble. I put on my parent hat creating challenges that would make the players re-evaluate their characters' attitudes. The paladin was asked to choose between personal sacrifice and slaying an innocent to benefit the greater good. He tried a third route and lost his paladinhood. The thief quickly fell head-over-heels in love with a woman who couldn't stand him, just because he misinterpreted all the signals. And the ranger rescued a sweet little girl from an angry mob that had burned her parents as witches. He became her guardian (though the girl really was a witch, of course).

Eventually, I was hired by TSR (how is another story) and found much of my weekly gaming coming to an end due to the workload.

I did manage to put on my DM hat once for the creative staff, to show them the answers I had developed for creating nondungeon adventures. The players were Lawrence Schick, Zeb and Helen Cook, Allen Hammack, and others. I began by having each player create characters. Then I sorted and handed out pre-generated backgrounds that gave their characters motivations. Then I started the game, with each hero playing solitaire. Their homeland had become an enemy-occupied nation.

Within half an hour, every one of the characters had broken the law and was arrested! I stripped the heroes down to a loincloth and dyed their left arm purple, just in case they should escape. The night past in the jail, and Helen's mage learned one spell from a dying old wizard in the cell with her. Then these criminals were sailed across the bay to the bluffs on the other side and a big wooden door in the cliffs. Still the heroes did nothing, until the mighty bar was lifted from the door and it swung open. A frightened goblin bolted, making a mad dash for freedom, and fell face first in the surf with one of the guard's arrows in his back. Now the heroes panicked.

Things didn't look good. The weaponless heroes were forced into a minotaur's labyrinthine lair and told to survive using their wits. Naturally I had seeded the adventure with sand and riverstones, flint, bamboo, vines, and many other resources including a hidden scroll, a spell carved in one wall, and a second tattooed on a dead body. It was a grand time, and amazingly, half of the party managed to escape and went for help for the remaining members, alive but trapped in the labyrinth.

Interestingly, the next day, Lawrence

Schick recommended we write that year's AD&D® game Open tournament as a product series—he already had an idea for the final round. The heroes would be caught, stripped of all their possessions and dumped into a monster's lair to survive. "Original idea," I commented. Thus, the A-series of modules—the Slaver Saga—was born. I had found a new way to annoy thousands of players with my role-playing.

By this time I missed the chaos I could cause when playing a PC. So I dusted off my player hat occasionally just to see if it still fit.

My hero Almar Tann, a wandering half-living thief, was created to playtest the *Desert of Desolation* module series in a campaign run by Tracy Hickman. Almar was a clever little fellow with the heart of a true hero and more pluck than men twice his size. Other than having a knack for getting into trouble due to his curiosity and willingness to take a risk, and making the rest of the party deal with it, Al's tenacity and luck helped the party to emerge victorious in the end and win a *limited wish*. Almar wished for a coin pouch that would always refill with nine gold coins once it was emptied. This seemed very practical and not too greedy at the time. Tracy was very agreeable. Little did I suspect that Tracy was about to whisk Al and the others off to the developing world of the DRAGONLANCE Saga and the first adventure, *Dragons of Darkness*. Gold has no value on Krynn.

Almar left his mark on the world when he discovered a lone pillar standing in the middle of a room. He climbed the pillar to the top and found nothing there. I told Tracy that it didn't make sense to have a pillar just sitting in the middle of the room with nothing on top. Tracy said it wasn't important to the adventure. So Al opened his coin purse and left a stack of coins for the next adventurer to discover.

Almar went on to discover many new things in the ruins of Xak Tsaroth, until we decided that halflings had no place in this new world, especially since Almar also had a *ring of invisibility*; it all sounded too much like another story. So Almar went wandering off into the barbarian plains of Abanasinia and was never seen again.

It was up to me to create a replacement, so I found my God of Krynn hat and fashioned the incorrigible kender, that child-like race that refuses to grow up, and the first kender representative, Tasslehoff Burrfoot.

Now anyone who has ever played a kender, had the misfortune to bump into a kender, or even heard of kender has swiftly discovered there is no more aggravating, though brave and clever, race of creature in the multiverse. Let's see somebody top that for annoying!

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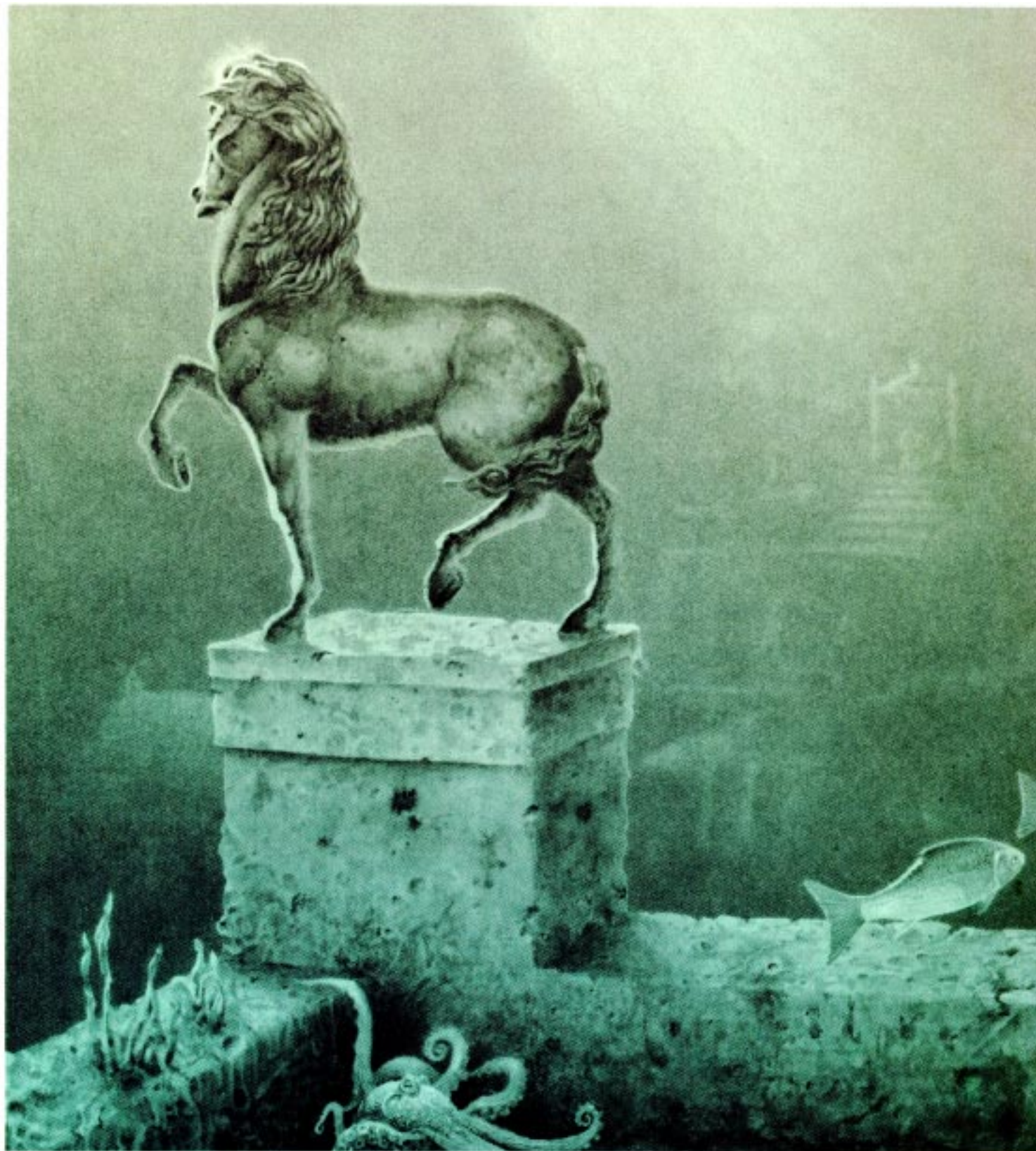
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Add an Atlantis to your campaign's background

by David Howery

Artwork by Bob Klasnich

One of the foundations of fantasy games and literature is the legend of lost empires. History has numerous examples of lands that once ruled far and wide, but later fell into decline and vanished: Troy, Rome, Babylon, Persia. Fantasy worlds have similar legendary empires, and many are the source of powerful magic and lost lore. The GREYHAWK® campaign world,

for example, has no less than three lost lands: the Suel Imperium, the Bakluni Empire, and the Great Kingdom of Aerdy. The DRAGONLANCE® setting of Krynn has Istar, destroyed by the gods in the Cataclysm. The FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting is littered with the ruins of empire: Netheril, Illefarn, Imaskar, and others.

The most fascinating legends of lost



empires from our own folklore tell us of lands that have disappeared beneath the ocean: Atlantis, Lemuria, and Mu. Explorers have sought traces of these lost lands throughout history. Columbus hoped to find remnants of Atlantis on his first trip across the Atlantic ocean. Many English and Spanish settlers thought the Native Americans were Atlantis' survivors. Other

explorers searched for lost lands in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

The existence of places such as Atlantis and Mu has been argued for centuries. Certainly Atlantis features prominently in many works of fiction, comic books, and B-movies, but to date, no one has proven that Atlantis really existed, at least not to the satisfaction of the scientific commu-

nity. In the pure imagination of fantasy games, however, lost empires are easily added and discovered. This article presents background information on three famous legendary lost lands (Atlantis, Lemuria, and Mu) and describes how to integrate them into a fantasy campaign world.

Atlantis

No legend of the past has created more controversy and interest than Atlantis. Several authors have tried to prove that Atlantis really existed, but to no avail—books on Atlantis are still usually placed in the “occult” or “speculation” sections of bookstores.

The roots of Atlantean lore are two works of Plato called *Timaeus* and *Critias*. *Timaeus* is a dialogue-form manuscript of a conversation between four Greek sages. Socrates asks Critias to tell a story of ancient days. Critias responds by telling of another sage, Solon, who traveled to Egypt and discussed history with a priest of Sais. The priest told Solon about a huge island or continent in the sea beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar). The manuscript also mentions a mysterious “opposite continent” beyond Atlantis, which modern scholars interpret as the Americas, although it is amazing that ancient Greeks knew about the New World. Atlantis was a great and powerful nation that colonized much of the Mediterranean world. Their empire lasted until the Greeks, led by Athens, defeated the Atlanteans and drove them out of Europe. Soon after, Atlantis sank in a cataclysm of earthquakes and floods. Even proponents of Atlantis dismiss his story as propaganda, designed to prop

up Athenian morale at a low point of her history.

Plato's other dialogue, *Critias*, delves into Atlantis in much greater detail. *Critias* relates that Atlantis was established by Poseidon, who divided the land and its colonies into ten kingdoms with ten kings. Atlantis was extremely wealthy, with mines of gold, silver, and a mysterious metal called *orichalcum*. The island had plentiful timber, fresh water, and abundant crops. Cattle, horses, and elephants were common, as were mysterious huge and voracious carnivores. Extensive canals and magnificent palaces of marble and gold connected and decorated her cities. The Atlantean army was large, much larger than any in Europe or Africa, and the fleet numbered 1,200 warships. The last part of *Critias* tells of the decline of the divine nature of the Atlanteans, and their fall into debauchery, greed, and madness. Zeus calls the gods together to speak with them about Atlantis' fate—at which point, the *Critias* ends abruptly.

Other sages of ancient times wrote about Atlantis, but long after Plato. Diodorus Siculus, of Julius Caesar's time, wrote an epic tale of Atlantis' war with an Amazon tribe. Tales of Atlantis, or isles of a similar nature, were written by Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Theopompus, Proclus

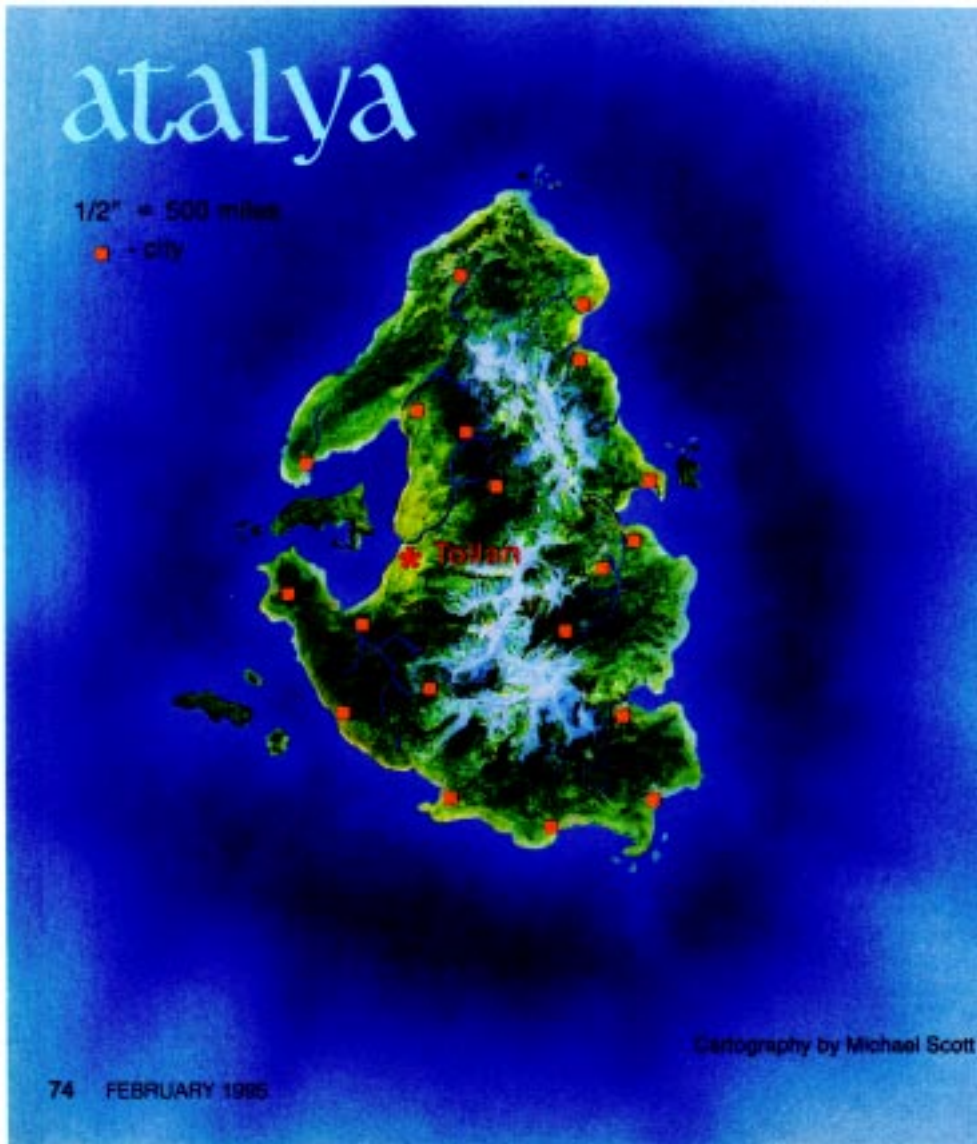
and numerous writers of medieval times. In more modern times, Ignatius Donnelly, an Illinois politician during the Civil War, published the first logical attempt to prove Atlantis really existed, with his book *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* in 1882. Lewis Spence, a Scottish author and authority on occult subjects, published *The History of Atlantis* in 1926. Dozens of other books have been published about Atlantis since.

One of the latest and best entries in the field is *Atlantis, the Eighth Continent* by Charles Berlitz (1984). Berlitz postulates an Atlantis of high civilization existing on a large continent in the Atlantic ocean. The current Canary and Azores islands are the highest of what were once Atlantis' mountains. Atlantis' colonies included the Americas, northern Africa, and western Europe. Atlantis' sinking about 12,000 years ago inspired the tales of the Great Flood that exist in nearly every culture. Remnants of Atlantean culture can be found in mysterious ruins on the Canary Islands, Brazil, Spain, and the Caribbean. Berlitz also hints that the Atlanteans had some ultra-modern technology, such as atomic bombs and the ability to manipulate the earth's natural magnetic fields to move huge stones. In spite of Berlitz's effort, Atlantis is still a myth.

While Atlantis's existence isn't proven, many authors have linked several ancient ruins around the Atlantic shores to the legend. The Canary Islands were inhabited by the Gaunches, who were exterminated by the Spanish. Although the Gaunches practiced a bare subsistence agriculture, the islands have ruins of circular buildings that the Gaunches could not build or repair, stone tablets they could not read, and no boats; odd, for an island race. The Portuguese found no natives when they discovered the Azores, but they did find a statue of a mounted warrior on Corvo. Berlitz considers the ancient Spanish city of Tartessos a ruin of Atlantean culture. Lost cities of stone have been reported in several places in the Amazon basin, and ERTS satellites have located pyramids and other structures there, lost cities which no expedition has studied yet. Many proponents of Atlantis have pointed out that both the Egyptians and the Mayans built pyramids, which these authors consider an Atlantean trait passed down to both cultures. While there could be better explanations for these ruins, mysteries like these show that we still have much to learn about ancient civilizations, whether they are descended from Atlantis or not.

Lemuria

This land, by that name, does not have an ancient literary heritage. The name Lemuria was coined by Philip L. Sclater in the 19th century, and given to an imaginary land mass in the Indian ocean. The theoretical continent was meant to explain the existence of lemurs—primitive primates that live in areas as separated as Madagascar and Asia—before the theory



of continental drift was known. The name Lemuria also is mistakenly applied to imaginary sunken continents in the Pacific ocean. Robert E. Howard made this error in his imaginary history of the Hyborian world, the setting for his Conan stories (in which Lemuria was the ancestral home of Mongolian peoples).

While Lemuria is a recent invention, several ancient stories seem to refer to an ancient civilization on a now-sunken land-mass in the Indian ocean. Sumerian epics refer to the eastern land of Dilmun. A Persian tale, the Book of Kings, tells of Kanghai, a sunken eastern island. An obscure ancient Indian text, the *Upa-Puranas*, tells of the legendary Golden Land, Hiranya-Dwipa, and the history of its kings. Lin Carter's "Thongor of Lemuria" novels are based on what seems to be the one and only complete English translation of the *Upa-Puranas*.

Other modern scholars have also theorized and imagined much about Lemuria. *The Secret Doctrine*, written by a Theosophical group in the late 19th century, decrees that humans originated on Lemuria. W. Scott Elliot wrote about both Atlantis and Lemuria, creating lots of imaginary history about the peoples who supposedly lived there. The wildest account of Lemuria comes from the mind of Richard S. Shaver, who wrote a series for AMAZING STORIES® Magazine in the 1940s. Shaver wrote about two godlike races, the Titans and Atlans, who built incredible prehistoric civilizations but were later forced to leave Earth. Humans found some of their machines on Lemuria, and tampered with them. Their meddling released weird radioactive rays that transformed the humans into evil "detrimental robots," or deros (Is there a connection to the AD&D® game's derro, the evil dwarflike race of the Underdark?). Shaver made the deros into a type of demon or gremlin, responsible for many of the world's evils. Shaver's stories were popular, and even Raymond Palmer, then editor of AMAZING STORIES Magazine, supported the dero theory. Strangely enough, other people wrote to the magazine, claiming to have seen the deros in caverns. Sadly, Shaver actually believed what he was writing, and continued to write about deros and Lemuria long after the world lost interest.

Unlike Atlantis, no ruins are tied to Lemuria. The lands around the Indian ocean include some of the oldest civilizations known, including those of India and Arabia. All of the ruins here have been firmly slotted into known civilizations; there is no need to link them to Lemuria.

Mu

The south Pacific is a vast array of islands, coral atolls, and sea mounts, with wide stretches of ocean separating the large land masses. Often called Oceania, this area holds many mysteries. Many of the islands' natives have tales of sunken lands that had a high civilization. The best-

known of these legendary lands is Mu, of Hawaiian origin. Many cultures of Oceania attribute their learning to strangers from a land now sunken. Oddly, these strangers are sometimes said to have had fair skin and red hair. Survivors of this sunken land escaped to carry their knowledge around the Pacific.

While Mu sometimes shows up in fiction or speculation, few authors have dealt with the subject. The most comprehensive book is *The Lost Continent of Mu* by Col. James Churchward. He claimed to have deciphered the mysterious "Naacal Tablets" (which no one else has ever seen), which tell the story of Mu. According to Churchward, Mu's civilization began about 80,000 years ago, and had a population of 64 million! Mu was the Garden of Eden, and the fount of all historical cultures. Mu was destroyed and sunk by a massive cataclysm, which spread survivors and their knowledge around the world. Of course, this book is pure nonsense. The end of the book is a diatribe against human evolution, which perhaps shows Churchward's true reason for wanting to establish a "real" Garden of Eden.

Charles Berlitz's new book, *The Dragon's Triangle*, deals with the subject of lost civilizations in Oceania, much as he did with Atlantis. Berlitz digs up some fascinating archeological oddities, and he ties together ancient ruins and native folklore into his theory of a sunken civilization. Berlitz suggests that a Pacific race of fair-skinned, red-haired islanders lived on a now-sunken island that was the center of a far-flung ocean empire. The empire touched lands as distant as Easter Island, New Zealand, Peru, and Ponape. The capital island sank about 12,000 years ago, at the same time as Atlantis, throwing the race across the Pacific as refugees. As with Atlantis, Berlitz hints that the islanders had some ultra-modern technology.

While Berlitz's theory is probably totally wrong, there are some mysterious ruins across Oceania. A large ruined city called Nan Madol covers 175 acres on the island of Ponape. The city was built of massive basalt slabs and features a protective sea wall, a palace, tombs, temples, and dwellings. The natives of Ponape don't live in Nan Madol, don't work stone, and know little of the ancient city. A ruin of pyramidal pillars still stands on Tinian island; the native Chamorros say the pillars were built by people who came there before them. A series of hilltop forts still stands on the island Rapiti, forts which the natives don't use and don't claim to have built. The *Bounty* mutineers who settled on Pitcairn island found a huge platform with four statues, but no natives. Similar ruins have been found on several other islands, few of which match up with the culture of the native populations.

The most famous ruins of the Pacific are those of Easter Island, with its huge stone heads, called *moai*, at hundreds of sites. A lot of nonsense has been written about the

moai, linking them with U.F.O.s and occult topics. Most of this ignores the fact that the natives have clear oral records of erecting the moai as clan boundaries and status symbols. In the process, every tree on the island was cut down, which put an end to constructing both moai and boats. Still, Easter Island has other mysteries, such as a massive stone wall and ancient stone tablets that no one alive can read. The current islanders tell stories of the "long ears" who came to the island in the distant past and dominated the native "short ears" for a time. Thor Heyerdal, author of *Aku Aku*, suggests that the long ears were Incas from Peru, while Berlitz thinks that they are the red-haired race of his lost-empire theory. In any case, a lot of undiscovered history remains in Oceania, and the islanders did develop cultures of considerable technology.

Lost empires in fantasy RPGs

Vanished empires such as Atlantis are ideal models for fantasy campaigns. They can be added to a campaign in several ways: sunken beneath the waves and drowned, sunken but surviving underwater, a strong culture on the surface, or a once-strong but now decadent culture. Even better, the legendary lost empires were the most advanced and powerful cultures on the planet. In addition to unstoppable military might, the empire also had great wealth and magical power. What greater temptation does an adventurer need?

Atalya: A lost empire

An island empire, Atalya, is described here as an example of how to present a lost land in a fantasy campaign. Atalya has a history similar to Atlantis: a long history of warfare culminating in a unified empire, a strong expansionist phase with colonies on bordering continents, a decadent phase, and finally, destruction by a massive earthquake. The notes below explain how to include these phases in a campaign. The differing phases share several points in common.

Location: Atalya is located far out on the ocean, between the PCs' home and whatever lies across the ocean. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign, for example, Atalya would lie between Faerun and Maztica.

The fleet: Atalya's fabled fleet not only vastly outnumbers those of the normal campaign area, it is a fleet of superior vessels and weapons. Instead of the small cogs, coasters, and galleys of the PCs' world, Atalya has massive galleons (use the deck plans from the first SPELLJAMMER® boxed set or "The Lady Rose" adventure from DUNGEON® Adventures #34) and clipper ships (from the SPELLJAMMER *War Captain's Companion* boxed set). Atalyan weapons include Greek fire launchers, catapults, and ballistae. However, Atalya does not have spelljamming helms (unless the DM decides they do).

The army: Atalya's army is very organized and efficient, like the ancient Roman army, but with medieval weapons. It is a model of discipline. Auxiliary units include sappers, engineers, a huge siege train, elephants, and skirmishers, all backed up by a system of supply units.

The people: Atalyans are a race of light skinned, dark-haired humans. Like humans in other lands, they vary in height, weight, alignment, and character class, and they have no racial bias toward a particular size, moral code, or class. All speak the same language. No demihumans, humanoids, or manlike monsters live on the home islands.

Character classes: Atalyans have the same classes as other AD&D game settings: warriors, priests, wizards, and rogues. All subclasses and kits are allowed per DM approval.

The land: Atalya is a temperate island, slightly colder in the north and warmer in the south. A chain of mountains runs down the island's spine, and all of Atalya is blessed with fertile soil and tall forests. The wildlife is pseudo-European, including bears, boars, cattle, horses, lions, deer, buffalo, and so on. The islands also harbor a few tropical creatures: crocodiles, parrots, leopards, and herds of elephants.

Atalya: The barbaric years

Before its unification under a single emperor, Atalya resembles the Flanaess or Faerun, a divided land of feudal kingdoms. Many kings dream of uniting the island continent under their own rule, and wars of conquest are fought continually. The largest kingdom is Tollan, based in the port city of that name. The Tollanites hold the eastern third of the island. The culture is feudal and European. In this time frame, PCs who visit Atalya will find a land much like their own. For this reason, the barbaric years provide the least satisfying scenario to use in an RPG.

Dilmun and the new empire

In this setting, the island has recently been unified by the king of Tollan, who calls himself Dilmun I, Emperor of Atalya. The capital is the city of Tollan. The empire is young, vibrant, and eager to expand. The legendary fleet is being built, and 500 vessels soon sail to every corner of the ocean. Dilmun has organized the army for tight control; it is organized into legions, cohorts, and maniples commanded by centurions, optios, and tribunes. With no foe left at home, the army turns to wars of conquest overseas.

Dilmun has sent his warships out across the ocean, east and west, in search of new lands. What they find depends on the DM: it could be a typical feudal land (Oerth, Faerun, Krynn), an eastern land (Kara-Tur, Zakhara), or the New World (Maztica). Whatever the ships find, Dilmun seeks to conquer the PCs' world. Krynn could be a tough target, with its dragon-backed armies, but Oerth would be very vulnerable,

due to the recent wars there. Faerun stands armed and ready, but no single realm has the technology or troops to stop Dilmun's assault.

The first sign of the invasion is the Atalyan fleet anchoring offshore. The fleet makes short work of the small ships of the PCs' homeland, securing the coastal waters for the troopships to move in and land the huge Atalyan legions. The chaotic feudal armies find it nearly impossible to oppose the Atalyan legions, but the large, well-organized oriental armies might fare better. Dilmun will accept nothing less than colonial overlordship of the PCs' homelands; his armies must be totally defeated before he will give up. If the PCs rise to the occasion, they can prove to the world that they are the stuff of legends, by opposing the Atalyan advance.

Alternatively, the PCs could go to Atalya as ambassadors, or accidentally discover it on a sea voyage. Adventures based around the Atalyan homeland in this era will involve court intrigue, diplomacy, and assassination, rather than open combat. Atalya is heavily settled, with little wilderness left; one reason for the Atalyan explorations is that the empire needs more farmland to feed its people. Only a few dangerous monsters survive, mainly in the mountains. The cities are beautiful places, clean and orderly and made to last. The Atalyans build with granite and marble quarried from the hills. Commerce is brisk, and travel is swift over sturdy roads and bridges.

To the PCs, Atalya may seem like a place out of myth, and it could be just that. Columbus sailed to the west in search of India, and thought he might find the remnants of Atlantis. In the *Maztica* novel trilogy, Cordell of the Golden Legion sailed west, found Maztica, and brutally conquered it. If Cordell's ships had found Atalya, the general would quickly have found himself outmatched.

The decadent age

This scenario presents Atalya in decline. The overseas colonies have been lost to revolt and conquest by outsiders. The once-orderly army is now no more than a handful of bullying legions that deposes emperors who cut their pay. The rich farmlands are failing from overuse. The Dilmun line of emperors was usurped centuries ago; many lines have ruled since, but none for long. The cities and roads are slowly crumbling. Only the legendary fleet remains, 1,500 ships strong, enough to discourage would-be invaders.

The PCs could arrive in Atalya as discoverers of a legendary land, as ambassadors, or even as spies sent to learn the secrets of Atalyan shipbuilding. In any event, the PCs find a land with all the evils of a stagnant empire: Mad emperors issue bizarre decrees, constant civil wars rage, gladiatorial arenas amuse the masses, dissidents are fed to lions, and debauchery is the only constant fashion among the nobility. Ban-

dits and marauding monsters from the mountains are seizing outlying farmland, but no one seems to care. In the emperor's palace, intrigue, deception, and assassination are fine arts. Worst of all the Atalyans have turned away from their gods, in pursuit of revelry and pleasure. The scorned deities are preparing to destroy Atalya with a massive earthquake that will sink the island to the bottom of the sea. First, they will send signs of their displeasure: plagues, insects, boiling seas, and lightning storms. Because most Atalyans are blind to such signs, the PCs might be the only ones who notice that something is wrong. However, if the PCs mention it to Atalya's mad emperor, Marat, he is as likely to behead them for treasonous talk as listen to them. Unless the PCs take action on their own and turn the history's tide, Atalya is doomed.

Gone but not forgotten

After the cataclysm, Atalya has sunk into the ocean depths, and only a few of the highest mountain peaks remain above water. However, its influence was not destroyed—Atalya's legacy of ruins, artifacts, and legends remains.

If the DM includes a lost land like Atalya in his campaign, it should clearly be a forerunner of the earliest human cultures. Ancient ruins of Atalya's colonial cities lie in the most desolate areas: swamps, deserts, and jungles. The ruins should differ from the PCs' culture. For example, pyramids or ziggurats in a European culture would stand out as alien, as would gothic architecture in Kara-Tur, Zakhara, or Maztica. The DM can give free reign to his imagination when designing Atalyan ruins. They may be not only alien in design, but also superior in their construction. Atalya's magic and special materials like orichalcum explain the ruins' extraordinarily high towers, bridges, and arches. Of course, the ruins may not be totally abandoned. Such places are ideal homes for monsters, including undead Atalyans, ancient Atalyan monsters, and dragons attracted to the ruins because of the wealth they hold.

Magic is the greatest legacy of lost Atalya. Many of the powerful artifacts and relics found in the PCs' world were made eons ago in Atalya. Newly-discovered spells and magical items (such as those presented in *DRAGON® Magazine*) may be of Atalyan origin. The language of magic itself may simply be a corrupted form of High Atalyan, the tongue spoken at court in the golden age.

In addition to the colonial ruins, there are the ruins of Atalya itself. The continent was buckled and broken in the cataclysm, and most of the cities were reduced to rubble. By chance, the capital city of Tollan sank on an even keel and went to the bottom intact. The emperor's palace still stands, but is choked with sand. Many sea creatures swim through the ruins; sharks, rays, giant octopi and squid, dol-

phins, and lacedons. Intelligent sea races occupy much of the ruins, including mer-men, sahuagin, kraken, sea elves, and skrags. These creatures war with each in the streets where Atalyan legions once marched. Powerful PCs can explore sunken Atalya, but the problems of air and the crushing depths of the sea are difficult to overcome. It is worth the effort, because Atalya's legendary wealth was submerged with her people. [Editor's Note: For more on undersea campaigns, see *DRAGON*® issue #190's article, "Deep Beneath the Waves" and issue #165's article, "Undersea Priests." Both contain much helpful information on running fantasy campaigns set beneath the water's surface. —Dale]

The descendants of a few Atalyan refugees still live on the islands that once were her mountain peaks. They have regressed to a savage culture, surrounded by colossal ruins of marble and granite they do not understand. The savages avoid the ruins and the advanced tools found within. Like the rest of the world, they have ancient legends of Atalya, but nothing else remains of the legendary empire.

The undersea kingdom

Instead of destroying the empire utterly, the DM may choose to have the remnants of the lost empire survive underwater. In this scenario, Atalya is still a drowned ruin, except for the city of Tollan. Some

agency preserved the city as it sunk. The savior may be high sorcery, technology, or the pity of a deity. In any event, an envelope of air around the city preserves the inhabitants, and the inhabitants themselves may have adapted to an amphibian existence, becoming selkies or air-breathing sea elves. Still, the empire is gone. For generations, the people of the city have struggled to survive, growing small gardens and taking fish from the sea. The wealth and splendor of the city are only fading decorations now, because there is no commerce. Most of the legendary technology is gone, either destroyed in the cataclysm or forgotten from disuse.

As in the previous scenario, Atalya remains a legend in the surface world. The PCs could be led to the undersea kingdom by stories of the lost land and its sunken wealth. Even if the PCs gather the magic and lost lore they need to survive the depths and find the sunken city, they will find themselves among people who struggle daily just to eat. They also may be caught in the middle of an ongoing war between the Atalyans and the sahuagin. The fishermen have the advantage of numbers, but the Atalyans fight with the strength of desperation. If the sahuagin can collapse the air envelope around Tollan, they can move in and loot the city. The Atalyans are a heartbeat away from extinction, the last of a legendary empire.

The fate of Atalya's remnants is in the hands of the heroes. If the PCs intervene and drive off the sahuagin, the Atalyans may gain enough time to recover their strength and even return to the surface world. If the PCs simply take what treasures they can, the Atalyans surely will be overwhelmed. A cruel DM might even decide that the Atalyans' treasures have long since been carried off by the prince of the sahuagin, and now rest deep in the ocean trenches.

Conclusion

A lost land like Atlantis, Lemuria, or Mu adds good background details to a game world, and it helps the DM link adventures through myths, rumors, ruins, and treasure caches. Oddly enough, empires that are lost or vanished become the most enduring of legends, both in fantasy and reality.

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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage examines a few particulars about the AD&D® 2nd Edition game, including initiative rules, backstabs, and spells. The sage also fields more SPELLFIRE™ game questions.

Why do innate abilities have initiative modifiers (+3 according to page 55 of the DMG) when innate abilities are not like spells and do not require casting times (DMG, page 64)? Can an innate ability be disrupted as a spell can?

Although an innate ability requires only a brief mental command from the user, they don't take effect instantaneously when triggered. It often is possible for an opponent to complete an action before an innate power comes into play. An innate power, however, does not require a casting time and cannot be disrupted as a spell can be.

Magical devices such as rods, staves, and wands have initiative modifiers of up to +3; can they be disrupted as spells can? What about rings and potions?

If your game is not using the optional command word rule (see DMG, page 156) rod, staff, or wand use cannot be disrupted, although the initiative modifier still applies. If you are using the command word rule, I recommend that you allow the process of activating any of these devices to be disrupted, but the DM must make the final decision.

Rings (and miscellaneous magical items) generally do not require command words and they usually work just like innate abilities. That is, all they require is a mental command which cannot be disrupted, though there is an initiative modifier.

A potion cannot be disrupted once imbued. However, the DM might decide that

the container holding the potion is smashed or lost before the user can drink it. Drinking a potion has an initiative modifier of +1, but there is an additional modifier of 1d4+1 until the potion actually takes effect. Note that the +4 modifier listed on table 41 in the DMG is just an average figure.

Where is the information on alignment tongues in the current editions of the Player's Handbook and DUNGEON MASTER® Guide?

Alignment languages are not part of the AD&D® 2nd Edition game.

Would a thief's backstabbing attack always qualify as an ambush as defined on page 111 of the Player's Handbook? What about surprise? Would the thief automatically gain surprise if she wasn't seen and made a successful move silently roll?

The penalties for being ambushed (no chance for a return attack and roll for surprise to see if the ambusher gets a another free round of attacks with surprise) do not always apply to the victim of a thief's backstab attack. To qualify as an ambush, the ambusher must be aware of her victim and prepare her attack ahead of time. In addition, the target must be unable to detect the foe prior to the attack. For example, a thief who hears a monster approaching, successfully hides in shadows until the monster passes, then successfully moves silently and closes to the attack probably deserves to be credited with an ambush. On the other hand, a thief who turns a corner and finds herself facing an opponent's unguarded back should be allowed to make a backstab attack, but cannot stage an ambush.

Technically, a thief must surprise an opponent before she can claim any backstab bonuses (see PHB, page 40); that is, the backstab requires surprise, it does not guarantee it. Note that an unseen thief who makes a successful move silently roll has an extra chance to achieve surprise, see DMG, table 57, page 102; the target should suffer a -2 penalty for the thief's silent movement and very likely an additional -2 for not seeing the thief lurking behind.

In any case, most DMs I know dispense with the surprise roll and allow a backstab

anytime a thief makes an attack from behind against an opponent who is unaware of the thief and has no compelling reason to suspect a rear attack. In such cases, I still recommend a normal surprise roll. If the victim is surprised, the thief gets two attacks before there is an initiative roll. The thief's first attack gains the backstab bonuses and the second attack is a normal rear attack. If the surprise roll fails, the thief is assumed to win initiative and gets the backstab bonuses for the first attack and the victim and turn around and return the attack if she survives.

The third-level priest spell protection from fire negates 12 points of fire damage per caster level if the caster uses it on himself. If an incoming fire attack allows a saving throw for half damage, does the character get to attempt a saving throw to reduce the damage subtracted from the spell's total? What if the character also is wearing a ring of fire resistance? What of the caster also has magic resistance?

A protection from fire spell negates fire damage that the protected creature actually suffers. If the character can avoid damage altogether courtesy of a magic resistance roll, then no damage is subtracted from the spell's total. If the actual damage inflicted is reduced due to a successful saving throw or a protective device, then only the reduced damage is subtracted from the spell's total.

Does a symbol spell fade after taking effect or does it remain and possibly affect several creatures?

A wizard's symbol spell remains until triggered, then fades. It is entirely possible for entire groups of creatures to be affected by a symbol however; as several creatures might read or otherwise trigger it simultaneously.

A priest's symbol spell lasts for one turn per level of the caster and can affect any number of creatures who are exposed to it within that time.

Because there is a second-level priest spell detect charm, I think that a detect magic spell, which is first level for wizards and priests, cannot detect spells such as charm person. Am I right?

I don't know. If you're the DM, you're right.

On the other hand, detect magic reveals magical emanations within the area of effect. Now, I don't find anything in the *charm person*, *charm person or mammal*, *suggestion*, *mass charm*, *fire charm*, or *charm monster* spell descriptions implying that any of these spells do *not* produce magical emanations just like any other spell does.

Let's pause for a moment, however, and examine what *detect magic* can and cannot do. *Detect magic* can detect magical emanations from a charmed creature. If a priest casts the spell, all it reveals is the approximate strength magic, weak to overwhelming; the priest who cast the spell learns nothing else. If a wizard casts the *detect magic* spell, there is a 10% chance per caster level of identifying the exact type of magic; in this case, Enchantment/Charm magic, not *charm person* or any other specific effect. Note that this kind of accuracy is not always possible. The percentile roll to determine the type of magic can fail and the DM can rule that there are so many conflicting types of magic present that no one of them can be singled out. This might very well be the case if the charmed character also is carrying several magical items, has consumed a potion, and has also has received some other type of spell.

Detect charm exists as a separate spell for two reasons. First, it allows priests to identify magical charms when they find them; something that their version of *detect magic* cannot do. Second, it allows a magical charm to be identified exactly, right down to the specific type—it can distinguish a *charm person* effect from a *rod of beguiling* effect even when there are several different types of magic affecting the creature being examined; something that not even the wizard's version of *detect magic* can do. Note, however, that if the creature being examined has been subjected to several different charm effects all at once not even *detect charm* can distinguish between them.

How many missiles can a character wearing gloves of missile snaring catch in a single round? Is the number reduced if the characters wears only one glove?

Generally speaking, a character must wear both items in a pair of magical items before getting any benefit. One cannot, for example, wear one *boor of speed* and expect to go hopping off at a brisk pace. A character wearing gloves of *missile snaring* can grab one or two missiles each round. To grab two missiles, both hands must be free, that is, not holding weapons, shields, or other equipment.

What kinds of magic can a rod of cancellation actually destroy? The item description seems to imply that the rod only works on magical items, but there are some spell effects, such as walls of force whose descriptions say that the rod destroys them.

A *rod of cancellation* can drain any magical item according to the rules given in its description (DMG page 152), and some spell effects. If a spell is subject to cancellation, its description will say so.

Some DMs I know also allow *rods of cancellation* to drain spell effects that can be touched and that operate continuously. Such effects include the various wall and Bigby's hand spells, *prismatic sphere* (one layer only), and *unseen servant*, but not spells that summon creatures or animate plants or objects. If you use this variant, you'll have to decide what can be canceled on a case-by-case basis.

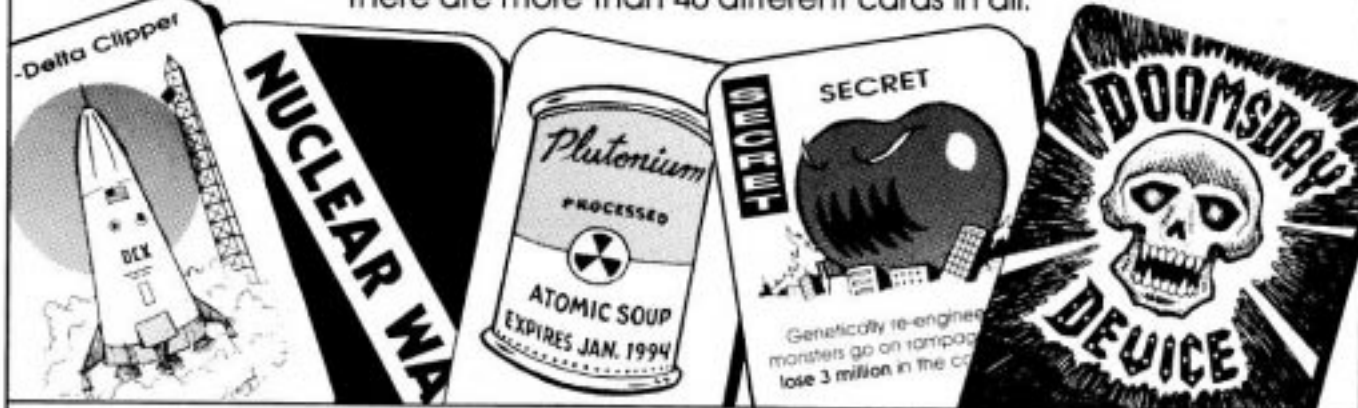
How is a wand of negation supposed to work? Does it act like a dispel magic spell, negating effects that already are in place, or does it prevent the target device from working in the future? If the latter is true, how long does the negation last? The wand is supposed to be 100% effective against other wands, but only 75% effective against other

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devices. Is a spell a device? What about wands with multiple functions; is a wand of negation 100% effective against the wand's primary function (or the first one targeted) and only 75% effective against other functions? What is a spell-like effect?

A *wand of negation* prevents wands and other magical devices from producing spells or spell-like effects during the round in which the *wand of negation* is used. It does not affect spells in any way. A *wand of negation* does not affect spells or spell-like effects that are already up and running, so the wielder must win initiative to be effective. The negation lasts one round and effects wands 100% of the time, even multi-function wands. A *wand of negation* also effects (75% of the time) any non-artifact magical device that produces spells or spell-like effects including rods, staves, rings, unusual weapons, and miscellaneous magical items.

A spell-like effect is anything that the user can invoke at his own discretion. Effects that operate continuously are not spell-like effects. For example, the defensive bonuses provided by *rings of protection*, *bracers of defense*, or magical armor are not spell-like functions. The attack and damage bonuses from a magical sword are not spell-like, but any extra, non-combat powers that the sword has, such as flight or trap detection, are.

In the original *Player's Handbook*, there is a +4 bonus for attacking motionless opponents, but the modifier is not included in the current *PHB*. Under what circumstances does the modifier apply? For instance, does it apply when attacking a sentry standing at his post? Why has the modifier been dropped from the current rules?

The +4 modifier applies when the opponent is incapable of moving or capable of only very limited movement, see the original *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*, page 70. The unmoving sentry in your example could be attacked with a +2 modifier for a rear attack (if the attacker were behind the sentry), but not the +4 for being motionless (because he is capable of moving freely). If the sentry were asleep at his post, however, the +4 modifier would apply. The current rules still contain the +4 modifier (see *PHB*, page 90), but the term "motionless" has been dropped to help avoid confusion.

Page 73 if the *Player's Handbook* says creatures can use weapons one size larger than themselves if they use two hands. What happens when a gnome uses two hands to wield a bastard sword? Does the gnome use the two-handed statistics or the one-handed statistics?

A bastard sword is a size M weapon no matter how it is wielded. So, your gnome

could use either set of statistics, it all depends on where the character grips the sword. Note that the sword has a slower speed factor when used two-handed.

DMs who don't care for this idea should feel free to treat a bastard sword used two-handed as a large weapon. The sword doesn't actually get any bigger when used with two hands, but the wielder is employing more of the sword's overall length and mass. (See "Sage Advice" in *DRAGON* issue #213 for more on gnomes using bastard swords.)

SPELLFIRE™ game questions

What does "immediately" mean in the context of the game? For example, the Intellect Devourer (#86) immediately destroys an opposing champion of level 5 or less. Is the champion's level checked at the instant the card is played or does the opposing play have a chance to play a card or two to increase the champion's level?

Immediately means that the card takes effect the instant it is played, before the other player involved does anything. Note that the champion in your example gets the benefits of any already attached cards when determining his level.

When an attacker wins a round of battle and proceeds to another round, he has to use a different champion. What happens if the battle lasts more than two rounds? When a champion has been used once in a battle can he attack again, that is, as often as every other round, or is the champion forbidden to attack until a new battle begins?

Most champions can be used only once per battle, no matter how many rounds the battle lasts. There are, however, some champions that can be used to attack or defend more than once, this special ability is always listed on the champion's card if it exists.

When a card is played during a round of battle, does it affect cards played previously in the round? For example, if one player has played three ally cards, what happens if the other opponent plays the Net of Entrapment (#217), which prevents allies from being played? Are all the first player's allies discarded? What about the Orb of Power (#310), which negates offensive spells; does the Orb negate spells already in play?

Generally, a card affects previously played cards. The Net of Entrapment causes allies already in play to be discarded and prevents the opponent from playing any more allies. The Orb of Power, however, cannot negate spells already in play, the spells are assumed to take effect when played and are beyond the Orb's power. Once the Orb is attached to a

champion, further offensive spells cannot affect that champion.

How does the Ghost Ship (RAVENLOFT® set, #73) work? If I attack the front realm in an opposing formation and the defender places a champion to defend the realm, can I attach the Ghost Ship to my champion and switch the attack to another realm? If so, can the defending champion follow the ghost ship or does the defender have to use a different champion? If the defender must use a different champion, does the original champion go back into the pool?

The Ghost Ship allows a player to switch his attack to another realm when it is played. When the attackers leave on the ship, the defending champion returns to the pool and any allies or spells played during the round are discarded. The defender must choose a different champion to defend the new realm. The attacker can switch realms only once. If the attacker does not choose to switch realms when the ghost ship is first played, he cannot switch realms later in the round.

Can a Dispel Magic (#346) spell be dispelled itself? Can a spell that has been turned with Spell Turning (#398) be turned or dispelled? Can a Spell Turning be dispelled? Who picks the target of spell once it has been turned?

Dispel magic and Spell Turning are two cards that cannot be dispelled with either of the two Dispel Magic cards (card #358 is the cleric's version of the spell). My colleagues at TSR haven't quite gotten around to explaining exactly why this is so, but that's the way it is.

Though Spell Turning can't be dispelled itself, any turned spell is subject to turning or dispelling, just as if it had been used offensively in the first place. A turned spell is always directed at the card that originally cast the spell. If the card is immune to the spell or the spell just isn't applicable (a spell-casting realm subjected to a spell that only affects allies or champions, for example) there is no effect. Note that some spells can affect more than one card. In these cases, the player whose spell was turned suffers the full effect. For example, Sunray (#362) destroys all undead in the opposing pool; if this spell is turned, all undead in the original caster's pool are discarded even if the card that cast the spell is not affected itself.

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Andra carries an enchanted staff that reverts any undead allies from being played against her. 24 of 25

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Dori the Bard

Dori gains 2 levels when fighting a or a wizard.

12

I live for the look of terror on my opponent's face. Seeing his crestfallen expression when I play that Loup-Garou ally or attach Johydee's Mask to Hettman Tsurin is just a bit thrilling. I'm not a cruel or heartless person. In fact, most of my friends would describe me as the opposite. But something comes over me when I play the SPELLFIRE™ card game.

In fact, I'm not trying to break the other guy's spirit. Trumping him is just a demonstration of skill. That's the real jolt, showing that I am good at the game. Unfortunately, I am on the receiving end of such tricks as often as not. Sigh.

Let me tell you some of the tricks I have suffered from recently. Each is named after the person I know that first used it. I have tried to research all possible card combinations and counters quite thoroughly. The number for each card appears in parentheses after its name.

Winter's flyers/No flyers: Several FORGOTTEN REALMS® realm cards prevent flyers from attacking them. They are Menzoberranzan (2), Pirate Isles (10), The Great Rift (12), and Evermeet (29). By attaching the Border Forts (198) holding to one of these cards, the realm becomes almost invincible. Border Forts requires that the attacking champion be a flyer. Any champion attacking the realm must be a flyer, but cannot be a flyer! Lots of realms force an attacker to be a flyer, but no other world has a holding that excludes flyers.

The only way to break this combination is to eliminate the holding, or negate the power of either the realm or holding. A Cataclysm! (99) event, Siege! (203 & 150) event, Iuz the Evil (167) champion, and Disintegrate (393) wizard spell can destroy the realm. Anavias (262) the DARK SUN® hero negates a holding's power. The Ankhtepot (84, RAVENLOFT® set) monster ignores holdings. The Crown of Souls (67, RAVENLOFT set) artifact ignores a realm's power. The Crime Lord (55) FR hero and Kapak Draconians (49, DRAGONLANCE® set) ally can destroy a holding. The Silver Spring (244) holding razes an opponent's realm. Takhisis's Helmet of Power (18, DRAGONLANCE set chase cards) magical item will eliminate the realm's immunity. Many of these cards are quite rare. Your best bet is to use a Cataclysm!, Siege!, or Crime Lord, all of which are easier to find.

Nesmith's everpresent Amarill: The Labyrinth Map of Shut (410) artifact prevents the champion from being discarded if it is defeated. Instead the champion, along with all his magical items, is merely out of play for a turn. This is a wonderful artifact for any champion. However, for a select few it provides some nasty surprises.

If Amarill (77) the cleric is defeated, another champion in the player's discard pile is returned to his hand. Notice that this happens when Amarill is defeated, not when he is discarded. With the Map at-

tached to him, Amarill may be defeated, but comes back after a turn. When a player is attacked, he can defend with Amarill and intentionally lose. Amarill goes away for a turn and the player can retrieve a champion from his discard pile. The attacking champion is spent and cannot be used again in this battle. You can retrieve champions from your discard pile over and over! Amarill is an uncommon card, but the Labyrinth Map of Shuc is extremely rare. It is only found in the 2nd edition printing, which comes in a blue box.

To beat the everpresent Amarill, you have to get rid of his artifact. Fast Talking! (210) and Ancient Curse (399) are about the only cards that do this. However, there is a sneakier way to defeat him. For the turn that Amarill is out of play, another player can lay down Amarill into his pool. Under the Rule of the Cosmos, Amarill cannot return to the original player's pool and must now be discarded.

If the Ego Coin (419) magical item is attached to a champion, it can carry any number of artifacts from any world. It would allow the Map of Shuc to be attached to other champions as well. The Ego Coin is just as rare as the Labyrinth Map of Shuc. My hat is off to anyone able to collect them both.

The Ego Coin and Labyrinth Map with Iuz the Evil (167) is very deadly. Iuz can raze any other player's realm if he is defeated. With the Map attached to him, a defending player can intentionally lose with Iuz, raze a realm, and still have Iuz around to do it again.

Any card that can eliminate the Ego Coin will ruin the entire setup. For example, Midnight (46) would cause lots of problems, as would the Fast Talking! (210) event card.

Peek's Loup-Garou two-step: This ally states "opposing champion is automatically defeated unless he has or can play a magical item." If the Loup-Garou (79, RAVENLOFT set) is played with a card that does not allow the opponent to play magical items, it is an automatic victory. Fortunately, there are no cards (yet) that do this.

A lesser technique, but still deadly, is to play the Loup-Garou with a card that destroys magical items or is immune to them. The magical item still can be played, thereby satisfying the Loup-Garou, but it is either discarded or ineffective. Generally speaking, the player should play the other card, eliminating existing magical items, then the Loup-Garou. Cards that eliminate all magical items in play are italicized in the list below. The rest just provide immunity or some other lesser defense. Midnight and the Flesh Golem are considered to be the best choices.

Qualifying cards: Icewind Dale (20) realm, Midnight Goddess of Magic (46), Giant Skeleton (192) ally, Kiara (171) hero, Codex of the Infinite Planes (152) artifact, Wind of Disenchantment (377) event,

Crushing Fist (344) wizard spell, Lightning Bolt (332) wizard spell, Orb of Power (310) magical item, Captain Kazhal (299), Sky Singers (278) event, Fast Talking! (210) event, Antimagic Barrier (68, DRAGONLANCE card) wizard spell, Wand of Telekinesis (63, DRAGONLANCE card) magical item, Irongnome (57, DRAGONLANCE card) magical item, Harkon Lukas (87, RAVENLOFT set) monster, Adam (83, RAVENLOFT set) monster, Flesh Golem (73, RAVENLOFT set) ally, Knights of the Rose (6, DRAGONLANCE chase cards) hero, Gib Evets (11, 1st edition chase cards) monster, Gib Htimisen (13, 1st edition chase cards) monster, Alicia (18, 1st edition chase cards) wizard.

As a side note, the Magical Champion (402) magical item can make the Loup-Garou into a champion. A frightening thought indeed! However, the Loup-Garou is defeated instantly if the Magical Champion is discarded. Many of the cards listed above can do just that.

Danovich's double trouble: The key to this trick is getting champions into the player's pool that automatically defeat certain types of attacking champions. Done right, no matter what type of champion the attacker puts forward, the defender can choose the champion that will automatically defeat him.

The best combination to date is the Lovely Colleen (22, 1st edition chase cards), which automatically defeats monsters, and the Living Scroll (408), which automatically defeats clerics and heroes. Fortunately for most players, both of these cards are extremely rare. Using cards that can negate wizard spells, such as the Tantras (32) holding, just make it tougher on the poor attacker.

Similar effects can be obtained with the Heartwood Spear (318) artifact and the Living Scroll. The Heartwood Spear automatically defeats monsters. The Heartwood Spear is a common card, but you need a DARK SUN champion to attach it to.

Defeating this combination is tough. You either must use wizards to attack the realm, or eliminate one of the two champions from your opponent's pool before combat. Such spells as Fear (348), Geas (394), Banishment (395), Death Spell (392), Bribery (204), Treasure (312), Takhisis's Mirror of Life Trapping (14, DRAGONLANCE chase cards), and Takhisis's Abyssal Gateway (13, DRAGONLANCE chase cards) can do this.

The most dangerous addition to this nasty trick is to lead with the Slave Realm of Tunek (405). No cleric or wizard can attack this realm. With Colleen and the Living Scroll in the pool, effectively no champion can attack you. The Slave Realm of Tunek, unfortunately, is one of the rarest cards in the SPELLFIRE game.

Ward's Cataclysm: The Cataclysm! (99) event card can earn you a spoils of victory card. Attack a realm, wait until your oppo-

nent selects a champion, then play the Cataclysm! event on that realm. Any interaction between the champion's powers must be resolved before the Cataclysm! event is considered. The realm is destroyed, unless the opponent plays a Calm (400) event or Delsenora (10, 1st edition chase cards), and the battle is over. According to the rules, the attacker is now entitled to spoils of victory. Similar tactics can be used with the Siege (150 & 203) event, if your own first realm is already razed or discarded.

Beach's unstoppable monster: A second tactic for making a champion invincible is to make it immune to as many different types of supporting cards as possible. The best example of this is the Gib Htimen (13, 1st edition chase cards) monster with the Net of Entrapment (217). Gib Htimen is immune to spells, magical items, artifacts and events. The Net of Entrapment prevents an opponent from using allies. Not much left but defensive spells and magical items!

Another example of this is the Tembo (310) monster, which prevents the opponent from using allies, with the Orb of Power (310). The Orb of Power makes the champion immune to offensive spells and magical items. Just about any champion with the Net of Entrapment and the Orb of Power can do the same thing. But that takes two cards on the champion instead of just one. Dagaronzie the Green Dragon (6, 1st edition chase cards) with the Orb is pretty tough. Dagaronzie can force your opponent to discard up to two allies. Attaching the Orb and the Net to the Tithian (301) hero, who automatically razes a realm if victorious, also creates a vicious combination.

None of these is as powerful as the Gib Htimen combination. However, the Net of Entrapment and Tembo are uncommon cards, the Orb of Power is a common card, and Tithian is a rare card. Gib Htimen and Dagaronzie are extremely rare cards.

Melka's eternal dragons: The Night of the Eye (42, DRAGONLANCE) rule card allows up to three DRAGONLANCE event cards to remain in effect at the same time. For most of the DRAGONLANCE events, this is no big deal. However, with the Bronze Dragons (97, DRAGONLANCE) event it is a big deal. Bronze Dragons prevents anyone from attacking you until your next turn. With the rule card, you become immune to attacks! You can just sit back and play your realms out each turn with no fear of being attacked. Unfortunately both of these cards are rare.

There are only a few ways to stop this combination. Anyone who plays another rule card will stop it. Delsenora (10, 1st edition chase cards) or a Calm (400) event card will allow that player to attack. Playing enough other DRAGONLANCE event cards eventually gets rid of the Bronze

Dragons. However, the best way around this combination is not to attack. Use the Cataclysm! (99) event, Siege (150 & 203) event, and Disintegrate (393) wizard spell to destroy and raze realms.

The catch-22 champion: Nobody has actually played this on me yet, so it isn't dedicated to anyone. The Lovely Colleen (22, 1st edition chase cards) and Edormira, Red Dragon (2, 1st edition chase cards) both can automatically defeat monster champions, although Edormira's power works only when attacking. The Skull of Fistantilus (10, DRAGONLANCE chase cards) artifact only allows wizards or monsters to defend against it. If the Ego Coin (419) is used to get the two together, only a wizard can be put up in defense. This is an unlikely combination since all of these cards are extremely rare. Any card that can eliminate the Ego Coin will ruin the entire setup. For example, Midnight (46) would cause problems, as would the Fast Talking! (210) event card.

Gross' march of the undead: The Sea Barons (133) realm gains the power of whatever holding is attached to the Great Kingdom (123). In most cases nothing special happens. However, the Arms of the Great Kingdom (145) holding doubles the level of all of your undead allies, even if they aren't being used to defend it. If this holding is attached to the Great Kingdom, it is effectively also attached to the Sea Barons. This means that all undead allies have their level quadrupled!

This combination is easily defeated. Razing or destroying one of the realms or the holding will do it. Unfortunately, undead are vulnerable to many different cards. Quadrupled level doesn't help much if the undead champions or allies are discarded or automatically defeated. Water Hunters (276), Protection (360), Sunray (362), Holy Word (365), Invisibility to Undead (370), The Avatar (20, 1st edition chase cards), Andra the Wise (24, 1st edition chase cards), Turn Undead (41, RAVENLOFT set), and Holy Symbol of Ravenkind (68, RAVENLOFT set), Takhisis's Mirror of Underworld Minions (15, DRAGONLANCE chase cards), and Blessing of the Gods (20, DRAGONLANCE chase cards) all destroy or prevent the use of undead. The Selune (39) holding prevents that one realm from attack by the undead.

Beach's ultimate punisher: The Nibenay (226) realm must be razed twice before it is flipped over. This means that technically it can be razed once, but retain its holding. On the second razing, it is flipped over and any holding attached to it is discarded. For most holdings, this doesn't make much of a difference. However, for Silver Springs (244) it makes a big difference. Silver Springs states that when the attached realm is razed, one of the opponent's realms is also razed. When Silver Springs is attached to Nibenay, you

can raze two of your opponent's realms if he razes Nibenay!

One of the best uses for Nibenay is to let it be razed once in an attack. This negates one of your opponent's champions at no cost to yourself. If Silver Springs is attached, when you let your opponent raze Nibenay the first time, you get to raze one of his realms. You can then go on to win a later round of combat and draw spoils of victory.

The only way to avoid being punished by this combination is to eliminate the realm or holding without attacking it. A Cataclysm! (99) event, Siege! (203 & 150) event, and Disintegrate (393) wizard spell can destroy the realm. Anavias (262) the hero negates a holding's power. The Ankhtepot (84, RAVENLOFT set) monster ignores holdings, but since the holding isn't affecting Ankhtepot, Silver Springs isn't stopped. The Crown of Souls (67, RAVENLOFT set) artifact ignores a realm's power, but Silver Springs will still raze one realm. The Crime Lord (55) hero and Kapak Draconians (49, DRAGONLANCE) ally can destroy a holding. Mogadisho's Horde (251) ally forces your opponent to discard his holdings. Many of these cards are quite rare. Your best bet is to use a Cataclysm!, Siege!, or Crime Lord, all of which are easier to find.

I'm sure there are many other nasty card combinations in the SPELLFIRE cards—these are just the ones I have found. I would love to hear from anyone who has discovered other combinations. Keep in mind that nasty tricks can be used by nice players. Remember, it's only a game. If you get nailed by a clever combination of cards, laugh and congratulate your opponent. If you stick it to the other guy, don't be mean spirited. Play the game for fun, not to humiliate the person on the other side of the table.

Ω



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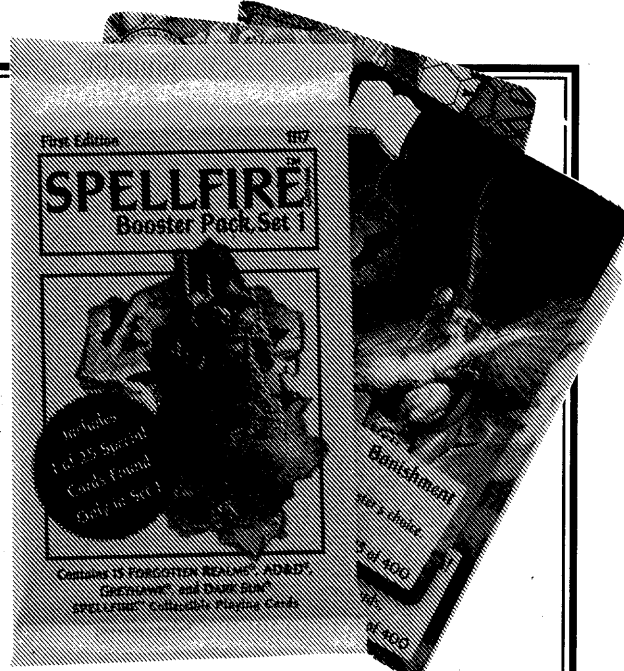
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THE ECOLOGY OF THE OWLBEAR

**Part bird, part bear,
altogether deadly**

by Johnathan M. Richards

Artwork by Scott Rosema

The two men traipsed through the forest, a study in contrasts. The older man, Griff, had the weather-worn skin of a man who had spent his life exposed to the elements. Gray was starting to show at his temples, yet he strode forward with a confident air, barely feeling the weight of the heavy crossbow he carried over his shoulder or the sword belted at his hip. Colin, on the other hand, was a young lad, cursed with a baby face and insatiable curiosity. He struggled to keep up the pace set by Griff, weighted down by the large pack on his back, nearly tripping over the walking stick he carried with every step.

They were nearing their prey, an owlbear that had taken up residence in the Spinewood Forest and had taken to attacking travelers on the King's Road.

"We're getting near," Griff said. "Take a look at that."

Colin looked at what the older man was indicating, a tree whose bark had literally been shredded in parallel grooves, vertically.¹ He stood staring at it for a while, marveling at the strength of a creature able to dig an inch into a tree with one swipe of its paw, then hurried to catch up to Griff, who had started off again.

After a few minutes' travel, Griff stopped, pointing ahead. "There," he said in a whisper. A cave was visible in the clearing ahead,, its dark interior cloaked in

shadows and mystery. "Quietly now, unpack the gear."

Colin set down his walking stick, lowering his pack to the ground. Opening it, he pulled out a large earthenware jar of honey. Prying off the sealed lid with his knife, he left it in the middle of the clearing, not 20' from the mouth of the cave. Then he backed his way to where Griff stood, at the base of a huge oak, his eyes never leaving the cave for fear that if he did, he would be taken unawares by the beast that dwelled inside.

"Hold this," commanded Griff, passing Colin his crossbow. Dutifully, Colin held the weapon, impressed by its weight. Someday, he thought, I'll wield a weapon like this, and be a fighter like Griff. He often entertained such thoughts, but deep down, doubted that they would ever be more than dreams. His gawky, spindly frame seemed more suited to the life of a sage or wizard, and his insatiable hunger for reading had given him the nickname "Bookhead."

Suddenly realizing he had been day-dreaming again, Colin snapped out of it to see Griff on a branch above him, reaching down for his weapon. Colin passed it up. "Leave the stick, and climb on up here," the older man whispered. Colin leaned his walking stick on the far side of the oak, and clambered up next to his mentor.

"How much time do we have?"

"Better part of an hour, I'd say. Owlbears like to sleep 'til noon or thereabouts. Part of their mixed-up heritage."

"Why don't we just go in there, then? Kill it while it sleeps?"

Griff just chuckled. "Kid, you want to live as long as me, you gotta learn not to take chances. Up here, we're safe. Owlbear can't reach us, but this," hefting the crossbow, "this lets us reach him."²

"And we're using honey as bait? I thought owlbeats were strictly carnivorous. Their heads are all owl, according to the illustrations I've seen."

"Yeah, and their bottoms are all bear, but they still lay eggs. Just trust me on this, there's enough bear in an owlbear that it can't pass up honey."³

The two were silent for a while, as Griff readied his crossbow for firing. He had a perfect vantage of the honey jar from his perch in the oak, and yet was reasonably sure that he wouldn't be noticed by the owlbear, even taking its superior senses into account.⁴

The minutes passed, and neither resumed their whispered conversation, not wanting to take the chance of being overheard by a creature that could hear a mouse rustle in the grass across a field.

And finally, their patience was rewarded.

The creature shuffled out of the cave,

reared up on its hind legs, and stretched. Colin was overcome with awe at the massive beast. Seeing it in person was so much greater than studying the inked sketches that were available in the Scribe's Library. The creature stood a full 8' tall, the brown feathers of its owl-like head merging seamlessly into the fur of its body, somewhere past its shoulders and back. The owlbear looked around, and Colin noticed that it did so by turning its head instead of moving its eyes.⁵

Colin held his breath, afraid of being heard up in the tree, but he apparently avoided the owlbear's notice, for it dropped back down on all fours and approached the honey. Soon, it was lapping intently at the jar, seemingly oblivious to all else. Griff took aim, drew a short breath, and let out with a quiet "hoot." Immediately, the owlbear reared up, and Griff tightened his finger on the trigger. There was the quick twang of the crossbow, and the bolt went lightning-quick into the owlbear's right eye.

The screech was incredible. Colin covered his ears with both hands, amazed at the sheer intensity of the creature's death-throes. After what seemed an eternity, but was probably closer to a few scarce minutes, the owlbear dropped to its side, dead.

Griff jumped down out of the tree, landing like a cat. Colin, less sure of himself, climbed down. "And that's that," said the grizzled veteran.

"How'd you know one shot would kill him?" asked Colin. I would have expected it to have taken more to bring down something that big."

"And it would have, too, if I hadn't coated the bolt in poison," replied Griff. "As it was, did you see how long it took to die? He was dead as soon as the bolt hit, it just took him a while to realize it."⁶

Colin was shocked. He had always dreamed of being a hero, and idolized Griff as the epitome of everything he hoped to be himself, someday. But somehow, shooting at a creature with a poisoned crossbow bolt just didn't seem, well, heroic. Sadly, he realized his respect for his mentor had just dropped several notches.

While Colin was overcoming his shock, Griff had pulled out his long knife, and was beginning to skin the carcass. "Meat's not worth much, not the best eating, **but** a bearskin's a bearskin, even if there's only half a bear."

"What's this?" asked Colin, picking up a tight oval bundle the size of his fist. It seemed organic, and had little bits of bone sticking out.

Griff glanced up from his skinning. "Owlbear pellet. The beasts spit them up like a cat with furballs." Colin dropped the pellet and wiped his hands on his pants.⁷

The enraged screech of an owlbear split the air. Colin jumped and turned to Griff, half expecting to see the beast he was skinning sit up and continue its attack. But

no, the beast was dead, no doubt about it. The ear-splitting call was coming from behind them, from the cave mouth. As the two looked on with growing horror, another owlbear shambled forth on its hind legs, then dropped on all fours and charged.

"Run!" cried Griff, as he grabbed up his crossbow and hurried to load it. Colin was back at the oak and about to scurry up it into safety, when concern for his mentor made him look back. There was a twang from the weapon, and Colin grimaced when he saw the bolt fly past the head of the enraged beast. Then the owlbear was upon Griff, sending the man and the crossbow flying off in different directions with one swipe of its paw.⁸

Colin stood transfixed by the scene before him. Griff lay on the ground, obviously stunned, and the owlbear loomed above him, rearing up, blood dripping from one set of claws. Colin could run, either to the safety of the tree or back the way he came, but either way, his mentor and personal hero was dead.

Or, he could face the owlbear himself and buy Griff some time.

Grabbing up his walking stick, Colin yelled at the great beast, catching its attention. The giant head snapped in his direction, and it came toward the new threat.

Gotta even the odds, Colin thought. If I can blind him . . .

The boy dropped to one knee and scooped up a handful of loose dirt. He flung it straight into the creature's face, and leapt to the side. To his surprise, the owlbear matched his move, not bothered in the least by the cloud of grit and sand.⁹

"Griff!" Colin shouted, as he narrowly dodged a swipe of wicked claws. Sparing a quick glance in his mentor's direction, he saw that Griff was starting to come around. He also saw the crossbow lying in the dirt, its string severed by the owlbear's attack. Swinging his walking stick like a staff, Colin managed to land a blow to the side of the owlbear's head, but the attack didn't seem to bother it in the least. Colin did his best to keep out of the creature's reach, backing up in a circle.

"Griff! You okay?" Sweat was starting to pour into Colin's eyes, but he didn't have the time to wipe it away. Keeping the owlbear at bay was taking every ounce of his concentration.

"Fine," Griff replied, as he staggered to his feet. Out of the corner of his eye, Colin got a look at his mentor. Three long gashes scarred the side of his face, and one eye was covered in blood. Whether the eye itself was damaged or not, Colin couldn't tell, but he couldn't possibly see out of it in his present state. "Keep him busy," he said, pulling out his sword.

Colin tried, but as Griff approached from the side, the owlbear suddenly spun and attacked. Griff did some furious backpedalling to avoid its grasp, and tripped over the carcass of the first beast.¹⁰ Colin jabbed his stick against the creature's head

like a spear, managing to do little damage, but at least drawing the beast's attention away from Griff as he scrambled back up to his feet.

Colin was tiring rapidly. He sensed there was little hope that the two of them could overcome the owlbear; it seemed to sense their every move, and knew that the greatest weapon it faced was the sword, for it turned its attention to Griff every time he approached. The older fighter was weary as well, and it was only a matter of time before one or both of them went down. If I could only keep its attention, Colin thought.

And then an idea sprang to his head. Before he had time to think too much about it, he held his walking stick horizontally out in front of him, and charged the owlbear.

The beast reared up, but Colin dodged between the raised forelimbs and pressed himself against the owlbear's chest, forcing his stick into its open beak. Immediately, he felt himself in the crushing grip of the owlbear's hug, and even though he started to see blackness in the periphery of his vision, he held onto the stick, keeping the monster's beak from snapping at him.¹¹

Colin could feel his ribs starting to crack. "Hurry," he tried to say, but couldn't get the word out for lack of breath. Fortunately, the advice was unnecessary, for Griff had leapt onto the owlbear's back and stabbed down with his sword at the base of the creature's neck. The sword went in deep, and Colin felt the monster's grip slacken a little, even as he felt consciousness slipping away from him. The owlbear bit down in pain, finally snapping Colin's stick in half, and it spun its head around, almost 180 degrees, until it was staring at Griff with its huge, yellow eyes. Griff snarled back at it, and sawed with his sword at the creature's wound. The owlbear dropped Colin's limp form and spun in circles, trying to reach the man on its back, but finally, the beast fell to the ground itself, done in by loss of blood from its neck wound. Griff collapsed next to the dead beast.

Sometime later, Griff managed to crawl back to his feet, and stumble to the backpack. There, he unwrapped the single *potion of healing* he always carried. Staggering back to the boy, he poured it down Colin's throat, and he awoke, choking and sputtering.

"You okay, kid?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. How about you? Your eye!"

"I'll be fine."

"But the potion! You should have—"

"Forget it, kid. You deserved it. That was just about the bravest thing I've ever seen. Bravest, or stupidest, I'm not quite sure just yet. But I'll be okay once we get back to town, and to a healer."

"Should we go, then?"

"Yeah, we should. But first we'd better check out the cave. Just to make sure."

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"But if there's another one, we're in no shape..." Colin protested.

"No argument there, kid, but it should be okay. Owlbears might settle down with a mate, but you'll never find more than one mated pair in the same den. Now, cubs, that's another matter, and we'd best have a look to be sure, but owlbear cubs are a curious bunch, and I'm sure they'd have come out to see what all the noise was about."

Cautiously, the two entered the cave. Colin stopped to light a torch from the pack, and by the light it provided, they could see the cave interior was for the most part empty. Over in one corner, though, was a small pile of twigs and leaves, and mixed in with the pile were several white spherical objects two feet in diameter. "Bingo," said Griff. "Eggs. We're in luck, kid. These things go for 2,000 pieces of silver each."¹²

"We'll never carry them all off in our condition."

"Yeah, true, but do you think you could manage one? We can always come back for the others."

"Okay."

On the long way home, Colin hefting the owlbear egg, and Griff shouldering the broken crossbow and backpack, Colin asked his mentor a question that had been puzzling him.

"You know, I read that the owlbear was created by a wizard, a long time ago, as a guardian. And that he combined the strengths of both owls and bears to make his creation as formidable as possible!"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, I've always wondered about that. You'd think that he'd have created the owlbear with wings. I mean, owls are practically silent when they fly. It just seems odd that he'd have missed so obvious an advantage."

"Let's just be glad he did, kid. Can you imagine if we had flying owlbears around here? I don't even want to think about it."

"I guess you're right."¹³

Notes

1. This is a common sight in owlbear-infested areas. The creatures claw at selected trees with their front paws. This not only keeps their claws sharp, but marks off an owlbear's territory.

2. Because of their great size and weight, owlbears are not good tree climbers. Any-one treed by an owlbear is not completely safe, though, because the beasts are just nasty enough to wait it out, and are often strong enough to knock over the tree, depending on the size of both the owlbear and the tree.

3. This appears to be the only exception to the owlbear's otherwise carnivorous diet. It remains well-adapted to honey-gathering, as its thick coat of fur and feathers protects it from bee stings, and it retains the long tongue of a bear, perfect for lapping up the sticky substance.

4. Like the owl, an owlbear has double

normal infravision, and quadruple normal hearing. In fact, the owlbear's hearing is so finely developed that it can attack normally in total darkness, and similarly can attack *invisible* creatures without penalty. Of course, this can be nullified with a *silence* spell.

5. Indeed, the owlbear's eyes are fixed in its head, looking straight ahead. It compensates for this by being able to turn its head a full 270 degrees, as compared to a human's 180. The owlbear has twice as many neck bones as does a human (fourteen to our seven) which allows for this flexibility. In addition, an owlbear can snap its neck from one position to another almost instantaneously.

6. The rugged constitution of an owlbear allows it to fight on for 1-4 rounds after it reaches 0 to -8 hit points. Once brought to -9 or fewer hit points, however, it is immediately slain.

7. Like owls, owlbears tear their food into chunks and swallow the chunks whole. Inside the stomach, much of the prey is digested, but bones, fur, feathers, and insect shells are churned into pellets, and regurgitated by the beast. These pellets are usually found near an owlbear's lair, and are thus a good indicator of an owlbear's presence nearby.

8. Owlbears, like humans, can rotate their forearms, and this gives them great strength and agility in seizing their prey. It is perhaps this feature alone which gives the owlbear its deadly ability to "hug" its opponents—and, as Griff just found out, allows them to make powerful side-swipes with their wicked claws.

9. Owlbears have a transparent third eyelid (also called a nictitating membrane) that they can flip across their eyes at will. This protects their sensitive eyes from dust, grit, and the like, but it also can protect them from strong light. Light spells are therefore ineffectual as blinding attacks against an owlbear.

10. So acute is the owlbear's sense of hearing that even in melee, it's almost impossible to sneak up on one. Owlbear ears are somewhat unique in that they are asymmetrical; one ear is higher than the other, and this makes it extremely efficient in pinpointing exactly where a particular sound is coming from. This fact has no doubt proven to be very unnerving to many a thief who tried using his ability to move silently to move past an owlbear.

11. Fortunately for Colin, once an owlbear gets a victim into a hug, it cannot use its claws to attack, relying on its crushing strength and sharp beak to kill its prey. Colin's surprise attack managed to neutralize the owlbear's claw and beak attacks, at the cost of automatic hugging damage each round.

12. Owlbear eggs are nearly perfect spheres. There will be from one to six eggs in an clutch; the eggs are laid several days apart. Once the young start to hatch, the parents provide them with freshly-killed meat. Owlbear "cubs" are carnivores

from the start, and even though the mother owlbear is half bear, she does not produce milk for her young. The young will be raised by the mother for the first two years, during which time she will teach the cubs how to hunt for themselves. After the end of the second year, the cubs will go off on their own and stake out their own territory.

13. The suggested revised experience-point value for owlbears with the extra abilities listed in this article is 650 XP.

In addition to the normal owlbear, there is also the arctic variety (hinted at in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* book), and, if your campaign world permits it, the winged variety.

Arctic owlbear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any arctic

FREQUENCY Very rare

ORGANIZATION: Pack

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day

DIET Carnivore

INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)

TREASURE: Incidental

ALIGNMENT Neutral

NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-8)

ARMOR CLASS: 5

MOVEMENT: 12, Sw 9

HIT DICE: 8 +2

THAC0: 13

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: **1-10/1-10/2-12**

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to cold-based attacks

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: L (12' tall)

MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special

XP VALUE: 2,000

Arctic owlbears are the polar cousins of the normal owlbear; they resemble a cross between a snowy owl and a polar bear. Both fur and feathers are a snowy white, while the claws and beak are both black. Yellow, glowing eyes look forward from a rounded head. Arctic owlbears speak the owlbear language, made up of loud screeches.

Combat: Arctic owlbears are as foul-tempered as their forest-dwelling cousins, immediately attacking prey with their front claws and wicked beak. They hug for 2-16 points of damage per round after scoring a claw hit with a roll of 18 or better. Once engaged in a hugging attack, the arctic owlbear cannot use its claws, but uses its beak to full advantage. A single attempt to break free from a hug is allowed; use the chance to bend bars/lift gates to determine success.

The arctic owlbear's fur and feathers are all multi-layered, protecting it from the coldest temperatures, even when wet. For this reason, the beasts are immune to all cold-based attacks. Additionally, due to their ability to blend into the arctic environment, they are 75% likely to surprise their prey.

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Habitat/Society: Arctic owl bears live in the coldest areas of the arctic, often making their lairs in pre-existing caves or carving their own dens in banks of snow. However, they tend to be wanderers, constantly on the move in search of prey, and so do not settle in one place for very long. If encountered in their lair, a mated pair of arctic owl bears may have 1-6 eggs (20%) or young (80%) with them; there is only a 25% chance of one or the other. The young will be from 40% to 70% grown, fighting as creatures with 5 or 6 Hit Dice. Damage from an immature arctic owl bear is 1-6/1-6/2-8, and characters get a bonus of +20% to their bend bars/lift gates roll when trying to escape from a hug.

Ecology: Arctic owl bears live for about 20 years. They will prey on anything, but prefer seal meat above all else. Unlike normal owl bears, the arctic variety hunt primarily in the day, and, being good swimmers, will pursue their prey into the frigid waters without hesitation. They are well-equipped for their environment—rough, leathery pads on the bottom of their paws help them maintain stability over icy surfaces. The local inhabitants of arctic regions say that there's nothing worse than having an arctic owl bear on your trail, because of their stubborn de-

termination, nasty disposition, and constant hunger.

Winged owl bear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any nonarctic
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Family
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Late afternoon/early evening
DIET: Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)
TREASURE: Incidental
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-5)
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVEMENT: 12, Fl 18 (E)
HIT DICE: 5 + 2
THAC0: 15
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6/1-6/2-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: L (8' tall, 20' wingspan)
MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special
XP VALUE: 975

The winged owl bear is the ultimate synthesis of owl and bear. It looks like a standard owl bear, but in addition it has a pair of large wings growing from its shoulders. They are just as nasty-tempered as their ground-dwelling cousins, and speak the same language of screeches.

Combat: Winged owl bears fight as the wingless variety, utilizing their front claws, sharp beaks, and mighty hug. In addition, they are almost totally silent in flight due to the construction of their wing feathers, and this imposes a -6 penalty on opponents' surprise rolls.

Habitat/Society: Winged owl bears can be found in almost any nonarctic environment (when they can be found at all—they are very scarce), but seem to prefer wooded forests and mountainous terrains. Due to their flight capabilities, winged owl bears tend to claim larger territories as "theirs"—usually ten to twenty square miles.

Winged owl bears live in mated pairs. If encountered in their lairs, there is a 25% chance there will be 1-3 eggs (20%) or young (80%) in addition to the adults. The young are identical to normal owl bear young, as their wings will not support them in flight until they are at full size.

Ecology: Winged owl bears tend to live slightly longer than the normal variety, often reaching 25 years or so. They are sought after by wizards, even though to date no one has managed to domesticate one; nonetheless, eggs can go as high as 4,000 silver pieces, while the price for live young can reach 10,000 silver pieces.

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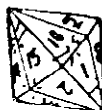
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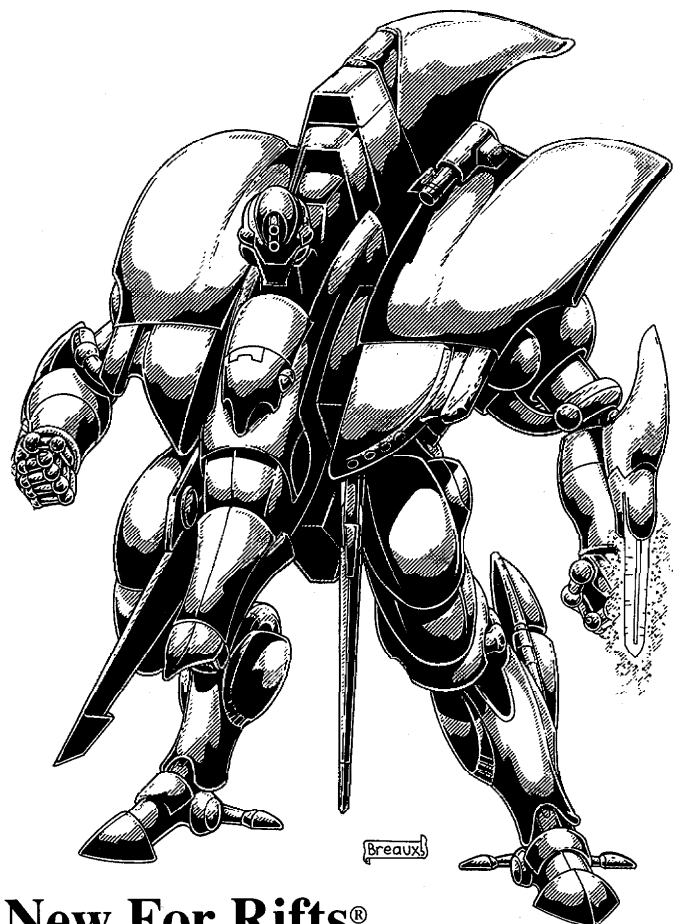
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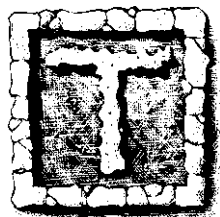
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he Queen's Investigator came to the village of Neveton an hour after sunset. The cool spring day had turned to rain at nightfall, and now a steaming coastal drizzle made the shimmering man and his dark mare glisten as they approached the night-guard on the

muddy road.

Majonar Heska was a gaunt old man with a hood thrown over his head, rich robes glimmering with gems and raindrops, and green eyes that shone in the darkness. He was a fragment of the queen's court, the kind of rich man who fills highwaymen's bloody dreams on moonless nights. But if they saw him, the queen's pattern woven purple on his cloak and the gleaming gold-hilted sword at his belt, they might think twice before asking him for his horse. He had been mistaken for a sorcerer once or twice, because of his clothing and his penetrating eyes. A maid with the true-vision could tell you that he wielded no magic, and yet he knew its workings well.

The guard was of night-men, their pale faces and huge black eyes sharp on the approaching stranger.

"Halt!" The first of three guards signed the unspoken order with the fingers of his left hand. In his right hand he brandished a blade-tipped glaive that the black mare sniffed distrustfully as the investigator reined her in. There had been gentle times in Neveton but this was not one of them, or the investigator would not be here.

"Do you sign? What is your business here?" The lead guard's fingers moved rapidly.

"I was sent for by the day-sheriff, about your murders," the old man answered in slower sign, his eyes glimmering in the darkness. "I am Majonar Heska, Queen's Investigator."

"Demon killer," the guard signed superstitiously, for the investigator's deeds were legend even among the night-people, and then he made a sign with three fingers that Majonar didn't recognize. "I'll take you to the sheriffs home. He's waiting for you."

"Thank you," signed the investigator, dismounting from his horse with a flourish of robes and leading the tired animal after the guard in the darkness.

The fishing village had a rotten smell. Few lamps lit the night, and Majonar led the mare carefully. Night-people mingled along the narrow roads, and they stared openly as the rich day-man passed by behind the guard. Though half the village was day-folk, night-people alone filled the streets beyond the tavern doors, while most day-folk slept.

Despite the bustle, there was no sound of language. Night-people spoke in tones that day-folk couldn't hear, even as the night-people could not hear the speech of day-folk. In Neveton and elsewhere along the coast, they had developed a sign-language that allowed them to communicate with day-folk. Still, among themselves the night-people spoke with their tongues, and the silent bartering looked like pantomime to the old man. When he passed a particularly aggressive fishmonger shouting—silently, it appeared—to passersby about her wares, his mare's keen ears flicked and she shied. The investigator held her head and patted her damp neck, saying, "Easy, girl. She meant no harm." They walked on.

Hunter Under the Sun

by Brent J. Giles

Illustrations by Joel Biske

There were lights burning in the lower story of the sheriff's house, a rarity in the dark fishing village. The night-guard went to knock on the door, and Majanar lifted his saddle from the mare's back.

The man who came to the door was younger than Heska, broader in shoulders and girth but lower in stature. He had a face that matched his build, heavy and flat with small clear eyes. The green pattern of a sheriff was woven into his simple tunic. "Investigator!" he said in a solid voice. "You've come at last. We were afraid the message hadn't arrived."

"Snow in the mountains," the investigator explained. "I came as fast as I could. Are you Sheriff Cappella?"

"I am," said the sheriff, staring despite himself at the rich man in the rainy street. "Put your horse away in the stable behind the house, Investigator. Then come in. There is important work to do, and we'll be glad to have your help. My wife's gone to bed, but she left food for you."

The plain room that filled the lower story of the sheriffs house was lit by a pool of light from a single suspended lamp. The investigator took a chair at the table and reached hungrily for the simple fare the sheriffs wife had left for him. As his eyes adjusted, he saw two night-people staring at him from the shadows beyond the lamplight. One was an elderly night-woman who sat patching sails in the darkness outside the pool of light cast by the lamp. She frowned at the investigator as he noticed her.

"Reyne," the sheriff explained. "We share the house with her. She's a fisherman's widow. She doesn't like us up at all hours of the night."

"I share her sentiment," said Majanar Heska.

"This is the night-sheriff, Dlong," Cappella added, pointing out the other night-person in the dark.

All night-people were pale, with colorless gray hair that hung limply to their shoulders. Their eyes were enormous and black, and their narrow faces were expressive, but they had an unhealthy appearance that had nothing to do with their actual health. The night-sheriff was no exception, though he was a strong, tall man. He rose from his chair in the dark and bowed gravely to the investigator. Majanar signed a welcome.

"Oh!" said the day-sheriff in surprise. "You sign! I didn't know there were night-people among the queen's court."

"I speak the languages of the realm," said the investigator, signing as he said it so the night-sheriff would understand, "or at least those I am capable of. But the guard outside made a gesture I didn't understand." He imitated the three-fingered gesture.

The night-sheriff looked suddenly embarrassed. "A religious ward," he signed, his fingers swift as albino spiders in the dark. "There is distrust in the city these days. The murders fuel it."

The investigator nodded. "Then we'll have to bring them to an end," he signed slowly. "What can you tell me?"

"Seven murders since last autumn," Cappella signed. "Night-women, old and young alike, who lived alone or with children." The stout man shuddered. "Died in their sleep, in daytime."

"The murders take place in daylight," the night-sheriff signed, "so they are Cappella's responsibility. But the deaths are always among my people."

"He thinks a day-man has gone mad," Cappella said and signed. His sign, like his speech, was firm and clipped. "Since the murders began, we've doubled our watch and seen nothing. It's unnatural."

"Night-people never murder," signed the night-sheriff.

"Untrue," signed Cappella. "You let your orphans die. You can't take the moral high ground with me, Dlong."

"I tire of this," the night-man signed angrily. "If children have no mother or father, they die. It is the way of the world. Among day-folk, orphans may be taken in by thieves or scoundrels, but among our people there are no scoundrels."

"Untrue again, I say," signed Cappella.

"Enough," signed Majanar Heska tiredly. "The queen allowed me to come for three days only, and we are wasting time. There are strange happenings in the mines in the southern hills, and I must hurry there next. You sent for me because you suspected a demon, the message said. Unless you have good evidence, Sheriff Cappella, I suggest you stop accusing the supernatural of murder and look to your own."

"The victims are poisoned, cunningly," the night-sheriff signed. "It is the poison of the sand-fish. The symptoms are distinctive."

"It cannot be," Cappella signed. "The sand-fish's secretions cease to be poisonous after only a day. And they cannot be found this time of year. The fishermen throw the fish back when they are caught—carefully because their spines are deadly—but they are found only in the autumn. At first we thought the victims died of natural poison, but now I say it cannot be. We're out of season."

"Someone has found the fish out of season, or kept them alive magically," the night-sheriffs spider-hands signed.

"Or mimicked the fish's poison," signed Majanar Heska. "A sorcerer could manage such a thing easily. Is there one in town?"

"Who's to say?" signed Cappella. "If we found one, we'd hang him, murders or no. We have a brewer who we suspect dabbles in such things, but he is a night-man. A woman could hide such a skill, or a man if he were cunning."

"There is a killing every few weeks," signed Cappella. "We're a small town, Investigator, and we have had seven deaths. A few more and even Dlong's peaceful night-people may take up torches and arms."

"Already there is friction between the fishermen," the night-sheriff signed, finally agreeing with his colleague. "Many of the day-folk share a boat with our people. It is less expensive to buy half a boat, and there are twice as many hands at dawn and dusk to unload the catch. I have personally broken up two scuffles already, and I have seen close friends separated by suspicion and distrust. I know you specialize in supernatural killings, Investigator, but I pray that you can enlighten us in this affair as well."

"The investigator's specialty is why I requested him," signed the exasperated day-sheriff.

"Most of the cases I investigate are from natural causes, no matter what the suspicions of the local offi-

cials," signed Majanar. "One way or another, we will discover this killer. But if he kills only in the day, then I will need some sleep tonight, sheriffs. The journey has been long."

"Yes, of course," signed Cappella. "I'll show you to your bed upstairs."

"I will greet you with the dawn," signed the night-sheriff, "and then it will be my turn to be tired. Good sleep, Investigator."

The night-sheriff left the house, and as Cappella led Majanar upstairs, the investigator signed an apology to the woman Reyne. She smiled at him and signed with wrinkled fingers, "Day-men are silent, but their lights are blinding. Investigator, I hope you can solve these murders. There have been orphans crying under the sun all winter."

"Why don't you help those children?" the investigator signed.

The old night-woman closed her eyes and shook her head slowly. Her limp gray hair shimmered in the lamp-light. "It is not our way," she signed. "Good luck, Investigator." Saying that, she rose and extinguished the lamp, and the room went black. The sound of water coming off the roof seemed suddenly loud in the investigator's ears.

As he went upstairs, he heard the night-woman spread the sail she was mending across the chair where Dlong had been sitting, and return to her sewing in the dark.

With morning came the sounds of normal men in the streets, and now even Majanar Heska could hear the cries of fishmongers shouting, "Halibut! Blackfish!" in the squares. It was a little after dawn when he came downstairs and found cloud-filtered sunlight streaming through the small windows of the room.

"Up early, Investigator?" said Cappella from the table. The sheriff was eating his breakfast. "This is my wife, Martha." His thin wife waved at the investigator. "Join us," said Cappella, and Majanar sat down.

"The investigator is a rich man, Jion," said the sheriffs wife. "Perhaps he would prefer another place to have breakfast."

But Majanar was already buttering black bread. "Is there a pattern to the killings?" he asked Cappella.

"Such discussions at breakfast!" said the sheriffs wife.

"The queen discusses war at breakfast," Majanar said. "This is merely a discussion of murder."

"No pattern," Cappella said. "The town is small."

"What about similarities in the buildings where the victims lived? The architecture seems varied."

"That's a strange question," said Cappella. "Why do you ask?"

"It's a strange world," said Majanar, and ate his bread in silence.

There was no similarity in architecture, Majanar decided after he'd seen the third house. Neveton was influenced by building styles from foreign lands, but the influence seldom changed the structure of the buildings, merely the facades. All of these were different.

Nor was there much similarity in the victims, beyond the obvious fact that they were all night-women. Dlong had arrived at the day-sheriffs house after breakfast,

wearing a black hat with an enormous brim to shield him from the daylight. He and Cappella led Majanar around to empty houses, describing the lives of the dead. At the seventh house, Majanar sat on the damp front step and fastened his outer cloak-clasp against the breeze.

"The last victim was an auctioneer?" he asked. Dlong nodded. "Before that a bread-baker, and a fisherman's wife. The first victim's husband died in the plague, and then she took up fishing herself to keep her child fed. I don't see a pattern there. Do you, Dlong?" he signed.

"It's the work of a madman," answered the night-man. His eyes were watering despite the clouds and the hat. "Madmen do things randomly. And only day-folk are madmen."

"Not a madman," signed Cappella. "A demon. Demons don't need reasons."

"You're both wrong," signed the investigator, narrowing his green eyes. "Madmen and what you call demons, they both have their reasons. Are you sure the first victim—Yana?—wasn't poisoned while she was fishing?"

"That was our first thought," the night-man signed. "It was said she looked unwell when she came back with her catch, and the day-men finished the unloading for her. But she was the first of a pattern, a murder every few weeks. She's dead, and her orphan buried, either way."

"If it is a demon," Cappella asked Majanar aloud, "could you destroy it? I've heard you fought the demon in the queen's own tower twenty years ago, and barely defeated it. Have you faced a demon recently? I hate to say it, Investigator, but in my eyes you're an old man. I hear that demons are ungodly strong."

"No one ever battles a demon, Sheriff," signed Majanar, his green eyes flashing for a moment. "You've heard too many stories." The old investigator scowled across the cold, wet street as though tasting something foul. He found himself looking into the unfocused eyes of a boy.

It was a night-boy, sitting in that cloudy half-light and trying to die. Dried tears streaked down his thin face, though whether from grief or the light was hard to say. The boy had small wrinkles around his eyes. When he noticed the rich day-man wearing gems, his eyes widened, and then his interest waned.

Majanar had seen night-orphans before, just as he had seen murders and wars before, but they did not please him.

"Tell me, Dlong," he signed, as the night-man kneeled down beside him in order to see the sign-language better in the cloudlit glare, "what will happen to that child?"

The night-sheriff glanced across the street. "He will die," he signed.

"Why?"

"Your people always ask the same question," signed Dlong tiredly. "The bonds between parents and children are strong among our people. They cannot be imitated by well-meaning strangers. This is our way."

"And the boy knows that?"

"He is not so young. He knows. He was the child of a family dead of the plague. His father died a week ago, his mother four days ago."

"He has been sitting in the streets for four days?"

"Probably." The night-sheriff sat flat on the ground and spoke with his mouth in an angry, silent way as he signed with spider-strong fingers. "You day-folk have no cause to question *our* morals, Investigator. Of the last seven thieves I have jailed, only one was of the night-people. And remember, my responsibility begins after dark. Day-men cause murders. There has never been a night-person who murdered, not in this town or any other. We're on the trail of one of your murderers now. And you ask me about orphans." He shook his head in disgust.

"Do you perform rites for them?" Majanar asked.

"Every autumn when the stars are right," Dlong replied. "The Orphans' Fast lasts two nights, and the priests beat drums that drive the day-folk crazy."

"Does it work?" the investigator signed.

"Ask a priest. How should I know? Certainly there are no orphan ghosts wandering about. I'd have them arrested." He laughed, silently, at his own jest.

"Did the first victim die after the Orphans' Fast in the autumn?" Majanar asked.

Dlong thought for a moment before he answered. "No, a day before the ritual started," signed the night-sheriff with spider hands.

"And her orphan a few days after the ritual was completed?" Majanar asked.

"Probably."

Majanar stood up.

"Where to now?" asked Cappella. "A night-priest?"

"No," said Majanar. "You said there was a brewer who dabbled in magic. I'll go to him."

"A night-man!" signed Dlong excitedly. "And only a neophyte sorcerer. While you waste time, another of my people may die!"

"Maybe," signed the investigator. "But I need the brewer's help."

"His help?"

"Yes," signed Majanar. "The sun is rising toward noon, Night-sheriff. Perhaps you should get some sleep until I have something more definite."

Dlong nodded, wiping his watering eyes. "Wake me if something happens, Day-sheriff," he signed, and walked away, past the dying orphan boy, back toward his home.

"What was that about?" asked Cappella conspiratorially. "Trying to get rid of him?"

"I'll get rid of you, too, Sheriff," Majanar said, "as soon as you tell me where that brewer is."

"I resent that, Majanar Heska," the day-sheriff said angrily. "He's a simple brewer. He does tricks during the annual fair, and that's the limit of his power."

"What is his name?" asked Majanar.

"Nobet, I think," said the sheriff, signing the name.

"He lives on the far hill, there, above the village. I would prefer to go with you, if you think there's something to be learned from him."

"Yes, Sheriff, I know you would. But if you saw him do something useful, you would hang him. That might not help our cause."

"He's a mere trickster!"

"If he were more, would he advertise it?" the old man said. "To you? Go deal with your day-watch, Sheriff. I'll tell you what I find."

The sheriff shook his head and walked away.

"I don't want trouble for this man, if he helps me," Majanar called after him.

"If he helps you, we'll buy him a cauldron," said the sheriff, not looking back.

Majanar began the walk to the brewer's cottage. "He doesn't need one," he murmured to himself with a smile, and his green eyes shone.

Majanar knocked on the door of the windowless one-room hut for two minutes before a small, tired-looking night-woman in a woolen robe opened it. Her vast eyes widened when she saw him. When she retreated from the day's glare back into the house, he followed her, signing the brewer's name.

The brewer himself stood behind his wife. He was holding a weapon of some sort, but in the darkness Majanar could see only a rusty blade.

"Nobet the brewer?" Majanar signed.

"Yes?" Nobet fumbled with one hand.

"I am one of the queen's men. I need your help."

In the dark cottage, the brewer put his weapon down on the stone floor. His wife climbed the ladder to a loft, leaving the front door open for the day-man's benefit. The smell of young children filtered from the loft. This blended with the scent of fermenting liquor that rose from a stone staircase that descended into the ground below. Even this far from town, both smells mingled with the odor of fish.

"How can I help you, sir?" the night-man signed.

"I want to open the spout of your glyph cask."

The little night-man looked stunned for a moment. "I don't know what you mean, sir," he signed.

"Don't play stupid," signed the investigator angrily. "People are dying—your people—and I need to find out why."

"I dabble in magic, sir," the night-man signed, "but merely for fun. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't lie to me," Majanar signed, his eyes flashing in the dark, "or I'll lead you to a noose myself. Simple cask magic may be illegal around here, but it isn't in the queen's eyes. Being uncooperative is."

The night-man winced at the mention of a noose. Without a sign, the small man lit a dusty candle from an ember in the fireplace and gestured for the day-man to follow him downstairs.

At the end of a shadowy row of casks, in a cellar many times the size of the cottage above it, the brewer signed, "Here," with ghostlike fingers. He pointed to a small cask set on its side, and already tapped for drinking.

"Powerful magic in the area fouls new brews," the night-man explained. "I keep the glyph cask, as you call it, sir, to make sure no one has been casting lately when I seal new casks."

"How does it work?" asked Majanar, squinting at the brewer's ghostly hands. Brewers' magic was a superstitious art. It varied from region to region, even town to town.

The night-man handed him a small pewter mug that had been sitting inverted on a shelf. His pale hands signed, "Close your eyes and fill it, sir, then drink it

down. If a man, day- or night-, has been casting spells near here, the ale will turn to water as it touches your lips."

"And if a woman?" the investigator signed worriedly.

"It will turn to blood."

Majonar sighed and closed his eyes. He found the spout with his hands, filled the mug, and quickly drank the contents down. He opened his eyes.

"Well?" the brewer signed.

"Not bad ale," signed Majonar.

"You have learned what you came for?"

"Yes, thank you, Nobet. My name is Majonar Heska, and I am in your debt." He walked toward the stairs where the lighting was better, the amazed night-man trailing behind and looking at him through new eyes. "By the way," Majonar signed, "if something other than a man or a woman were wielding magic, would the glyph cask show it?"

"Now you accuse me of necromancy," the brewer signed with his pale hands. "The cask detects life magic. I have no wish to attract demons."

"Wise," Majonar signed. "Very wise."

Cappella was waiting at the bottom of the hill. "I thought you were attending to business," said Majonar to the sheriff as he drew near.

"I am, Investigator," the sheriff said. "We've had another murder."

"Damn."

"An old widow, thank the gods. No new orphans. Did you find out anything useful?"

"Yes," said Majonar. "The night-woman who lives in your home . . . Is she a mother?"

"You ask strange questions, Majonar Heska. Reyne has a grown son, and another child died as a babe."

"Do me a favor, Cappella, and go wake her for me. Tell her I need her help."

"What's all this about, Investigator?" asked the sheriff.

"You were right all along," said Majonar, smiling grimly.

"A demon? How would the brewer know such a thing?"

"Something you would call a demon, and he didn't know. If you cause trouble for the man, I'll have your head."

"I won't, then. But you never answered me. Can you still fight a demon?"

Majonar walked past the sheriff. "Go ask Reyne to come, Cappella. Then we'll see. And show me the house where the woman was murdered today."

Before Cappella returned, the night-sheriff met Majonar at the open door of a run-down one-story house. "Another dead, Investigator," he signed accusingly. "Are you closer to an answer?"

"Yes," signed Majonar. "But you won't like it." He pursed his old lips and signed, "If I were to ask the name of a dead orphan, Dlong, could you give it to me?"

"Are we back to orphans? I am disappointed in you, Investigator."

"Answer the question."

The night-man glared, then relented. "Who is the

orphan?"

"The child of the first victim, Yana. No older than two or three, if I remember correctly."

The night-sheriff closed his huge eyes, then slowly opened them again. "My people will accuse me of becoming a day-man if I start asking after dead orphans," he signed.

"I would risk it," signed Majonar, "unless you want them to accuse you of allowing the murders to continue. I need the name quickly, Dlong. Please hurry."

Cappella and old Reyne, stooped and holding a scarf over her face, arrived before the night-sheriff returned.

"Reyne, I need your help," Majonar signed to her. He could see nothing but a slice of her vast dark eyes behind the scarf.

"Why me, sir?" she asked.

He smiled. "You're the only night-woman I know, and a man won't do. This may be frightening, but it needs to be done. I'll be beside you. Will you help me?"

"I can try, sir."

"Good." Cappella and Reyne sat on the front step of the cottage, and the investigator paced. He needed to hurry. Still, something was wrong.

The night-sheriff arrived at a run, squinting and holding his hat-brim with both hands. "I know the orphan's name," he signed as he arrived.

"Thanks. Tell Reyne, here," signed Majonar. Dlong mouthed the word to the woman. She nodded.

"This is the name of a child of yours," signed Majonar to Reyne.

"I have no such child," she signed. Her scarf fell from her face, and her expression was worried and tense.

"You must pretend that you do."

"How can I pretend that another woman's child is my own?"

"The other woman is dead."

"It makes no difference!"

He knelt down beside her. "If it is against your morals, Reyne, I'm sorry. I can only ask you to try. And this is the least of the things I will ask you to do. If I need to find another woman, I will."

"No. This is the name of a child of mine. Signed, the name would be 'Feyna.' This is the name of a child of mine." The old woman closed her eyes and pulled herself up as though tensing herself for a spring. If she'd ever be ready, it was now. And not a moment to waste.

The single room of the cottage still contained the old night-woman's body, not quite covered by her own bed sheets, from which a crooked pale hand thrust. The shutters were closed and the room was dim.

"Sit on the floor, please, Reyne," Majonar signed.

The woman glanced once at the dead woman. Her dark eyes widened, and she looked back at the night-sheriff. To Majonar's relief, the night-man nodded reassuringly to her. She lowered herself stiffly onto the floor.

"Leave," the investigator signed to the others. "Come back after dark. If you hear noises, ignore them. Do nothing unless there is fire."

"I can't believe you'd take that fisherman's widow into a demon-fight," said Cappella aloud. "If she dies, I'll

arrest you, Queen's Investigator."

"It's not a fight," said Majanar. "It may look like one, at times, but this one will be quiet." He hoped. "Leave, and let us do our work in peace."

"She doesn't even know what's going on!"

"She will. Go."

At last, grumbling, the sheriffs left and closed the door behind them. In the darkness Majanar sat down beside the woman. "Reyne, call for your child," he signed.

"Here?"

"Yes. Call as though you've lost a young child, age two or three. Can you do that?"

"Yes." She pursed her old lips and her face went wild with fear as though she'd lost such a child in the busy streets of Neveton. To the day-man's ears her calls were silent. When she glanced at him he nodded. It was merely an act on her part, but it was a start.

If they were too late, if it had moved on like a cold wind in the streets, Majanar knew the killer would not be found in time to prevent another murder. Every moment the ignorant sheriffs delayed might have cost another life. Still, the old man felt uneasy. If the brewer had tricked him . . . But that wasn't it. He was sure of the cause of the murders. And who better to call the demon home than this brave old widow? If he could guide her . . .

Something under the bed moved.

Reyne stopped calling. Her huge eyes opened wide and she backed against the wall.

"Call for your child! Call! Call!" the investigator signed. The motion under the bed subsided.

Reyne glanced at him and took a deep breath. She called.

Movement again, after a moment, rising dust and large black eyes in the darkness.

From under the bed came a child, a night-boy no older than two years. It was skinny and wrinkled unlike a child, naked and pitiful yet terrible to behold. It stood uncertainly, looking at Reyne. After a moment it reached out to the bed and grasped the dead hand of the corpse there.

"An orphan," she signed, no longer calling. Her vast dark eyes were filled with terror, and her bird-hands shivered.

"Call to your child," signed Majanar. "Call to it!" Now he realized his mistake. This child had killed without realizing it. It could do so again, if it grew angry or frustrated, and for the first time in a long life of dealing with spirits, nothing Majanar could say would prevent that. Only the fisherman's widow could speak to it, console it, care about it.

But a night-woman cared nothing for another woman's child.

"Call to the child!" he signed exaggeratedly. "Call your child!"

She saw his growing terror. Eyes wide, she called, tentatively at first, then more desperately, fearing perhaps for her own life. The tiny form beside the bed shifted uncertainly and let go of the dead woman's hand.

The child came, slowly, something malevolent in its huge, faded eyes. As it came it grew less gaunt, developed baby fat. Every few inches it stopped and looked at the woman and the investigator uncertainly, and the fisherman's widow called to it, desperately and silently, and the

child came forward again.

Too slow, thought Majanar. A day-child would run to a kind woman's arms, after losing its mother. Her appearance made no difference, not to a spirit. It was the feeling that mattered. The love was important. The mother's love.

But night-women had no feelings for other women's orphans. This ghost-child could never be stopped, not until the autumn ritual. When it reached this uncaring, incessantly calling woman, it would kill her the way it had seen its mother die. She would show the symptoms of the venom of the sand-fish that had poisoned its mother. The child had died just after the Orphans' Fast, so its spirit had not yet been put to rest. It was too young to understand why it had been abandoned. Such pain and confusion in life could spawn a demon in death. And yet, in spite of its awesome powers, this was simply a child crying for its mother.

The child would kill Reyne, then Majanar. Then it would stalk the town until the autumn ritual, orphans multiplying, or until night-people fled and day-folk alone lived here.

And then, perhaps, it would hunt the day-folk, whose voices it could not hear, until the town faded away and the child wandered through the empty husks of buildings and killed unsuspecting travelers, from now until the end of time.

The child reached the woman. The young boy stood awkwardly as a toddler will, and reached out his small hand toward her face. For an instant, Majanar considered grabbing the fisherman's widow and running from the room. But though the child had been slow, it was now too late.

For a moment they remained there, the kneeling woman and the standing child, so near touching and as far apart as life is from death. For a moment the old investigator watched his miscalculation unfold before him.

The child smiled at the woman who called his name. It was an uncertain smile, in the darkness of the room. And the woman smiled uncertainly back. The child climbed, heavy as a living boy, into her arms.

She called the child's name in his ear, and he laughed silently and played with her limp gray hair, eyes closed, fist clenched in the fabric of her gown.

It seemed to Majanar that they lived in the time of the dead, in that time before nightfall. For every hour beyond the cottage walls, barely a minute passed within, while the child laughed and the widow cried, and the investigator watched transfixed.

Darkness grew in the shuttered room as the sun set, and fishermen's work songs rose in the darkening air. When the glow from the sun faded in the east, the child also faded until the woman held only empty air.

"You've done it," signed Majanar, but Reyne's eyes were closed, her hands clasped against her breast.

After dark, the sheriffs came back into the room and saw the pair sitting where they had been four hours before.

"I heard crying," signed Dlong worriedly.

"Your 'demon' is gone," signed Majanar. "I'll leave in the morning. Take care of Reyne, please, Night-sheriff." Dlong nodded.

"I'll take you home," said Cappella.

"Thank you, Sheriff," the investigator said, "but I think I'll stay at an inn tonight. No fault to your wife, but I'm in the mood for ale."

The working-songs of the fishermen came in on the morning breeze as Majanar tightened his mare's saddle cinch. There had been no farewell from the sheriffs. In a few weeks, with no more murders, they'd be grateful, but by then he'd be at the mines to the south. Then, perhaps, home.

Someone tapped his shoulder. He turned.

"Reyne!" he signed.

"Investigator. That was an evil trick," she signed, her old black eyes gleaming under a hat like the night-sheriffs.

"I'm sorry" he signed. Another advantage of leaving town in a hurry, he thought. Not fast enough, this time.

"Would the child have continued . . . killing?" she signed.

"Until the autumn ritual, at least."

"I've talked with the night-sheriff. We're going to try something."

"Try what?"

"I can care for a few children. The day-sheriffs wife will help me. It will be hard to convince another night-person to help."

"Dlong told me not to lecture him about morality."

"We're taught to ignore the orphans, but we'll try your way and see. I could never stand it, hearing them cry."

"I'm glad," he signed. He led his horse into the stable yard and mounted, the thread of the queen's pattern on his cloak catching the morning sun. He smiled at Reyne and she at him, her huge eyes watering in the daylight. Then he rode out of town, inland toward the hills far away to the south. Ω



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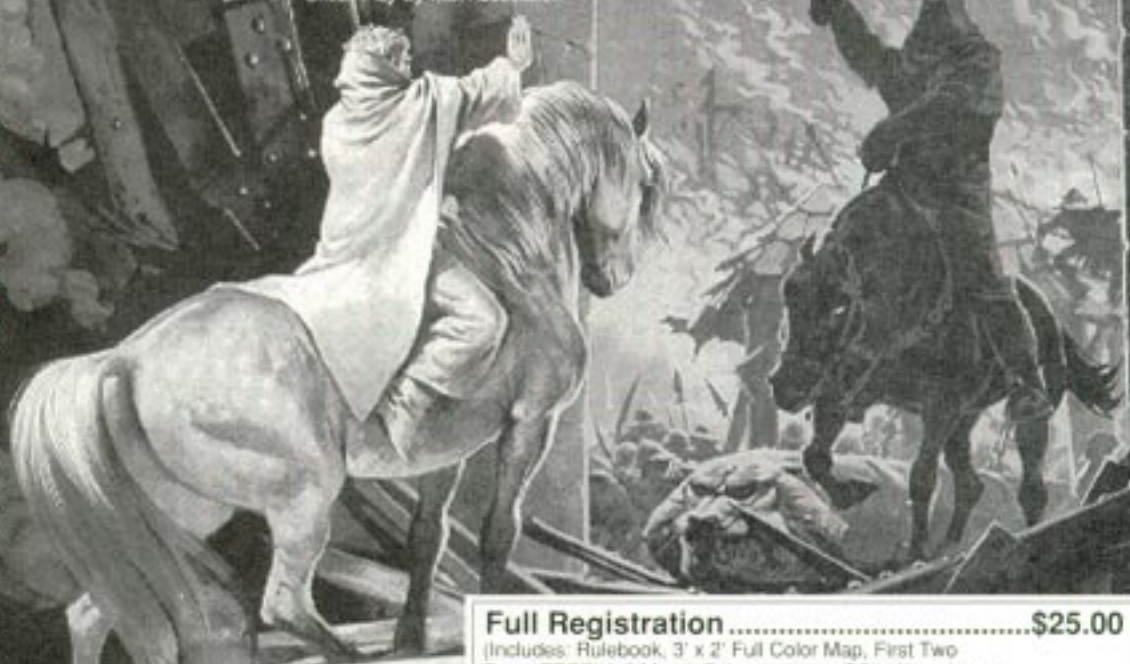
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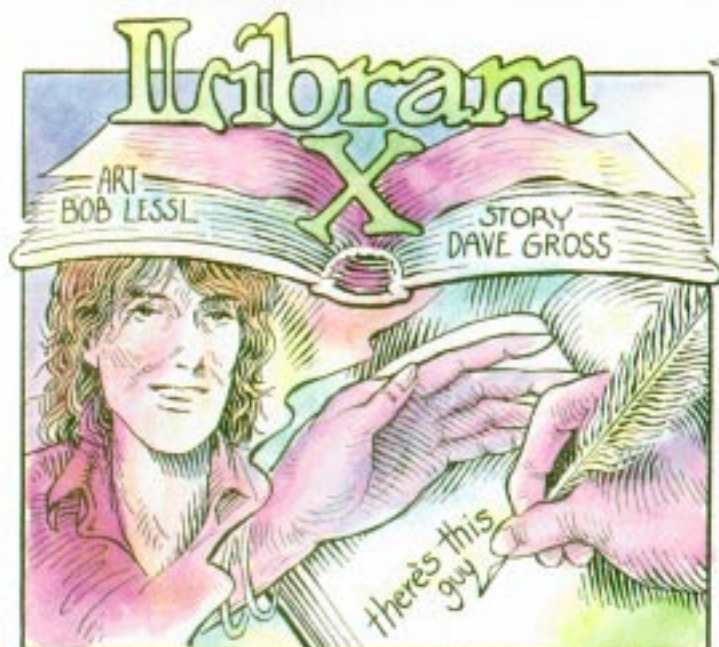
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AT LEAST WE USED TO. HE MUST KNOW HOW I FEEL, BUT SOMETIMES I CAN'T BE SURE.



SOMETIMES I THINK HE DOESN'T CARE ABOUT ME HALF AS MUCH AS HE DOES ABOUT THE BOOK.



IT'S CALLED LIBRAM X BECAUSE NOBODY KNOWS MUCH ABOUT IT, EXCEPT THAT IT'S SUPPOSED TO CONTROL THE MAZEWORKS.

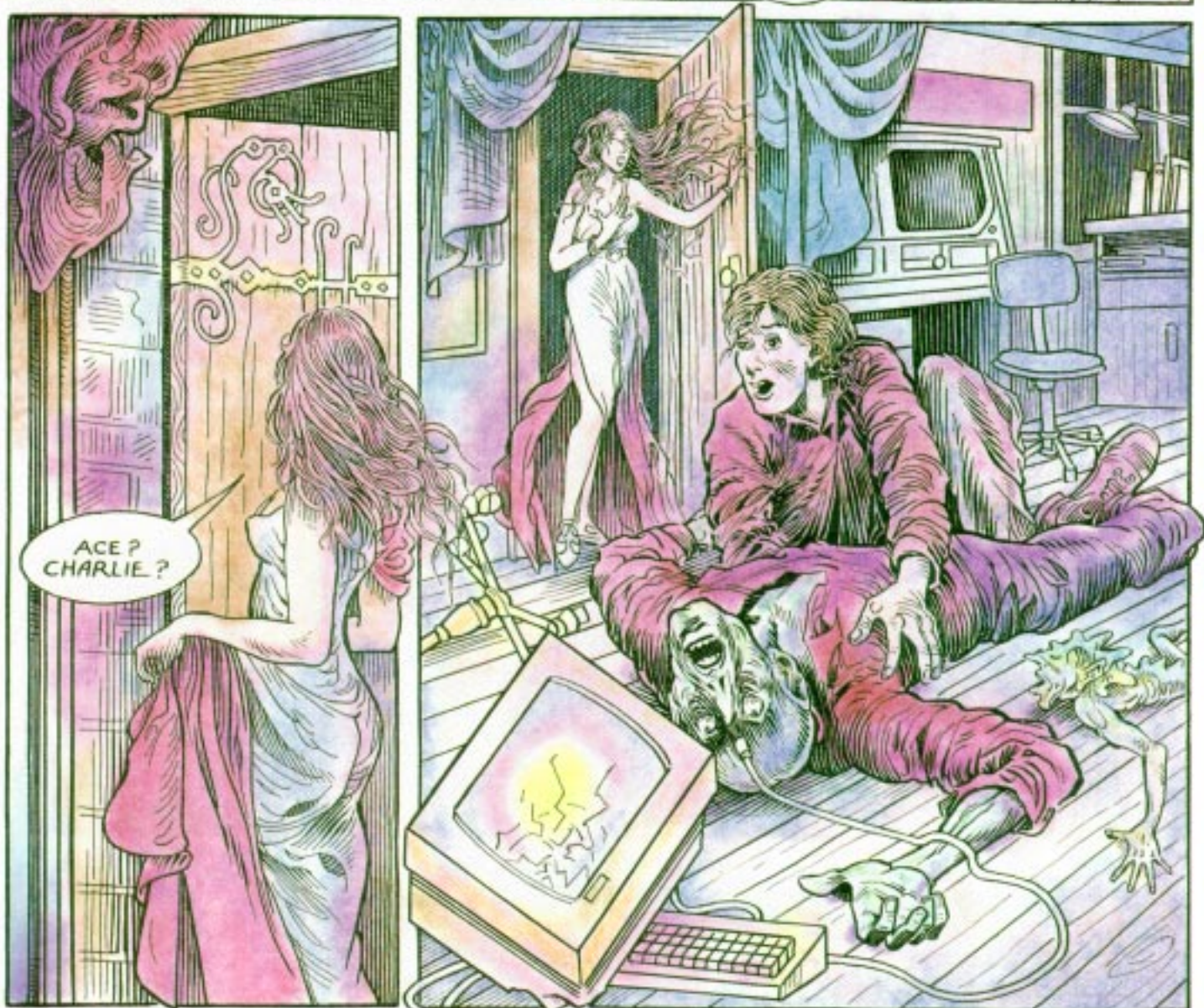
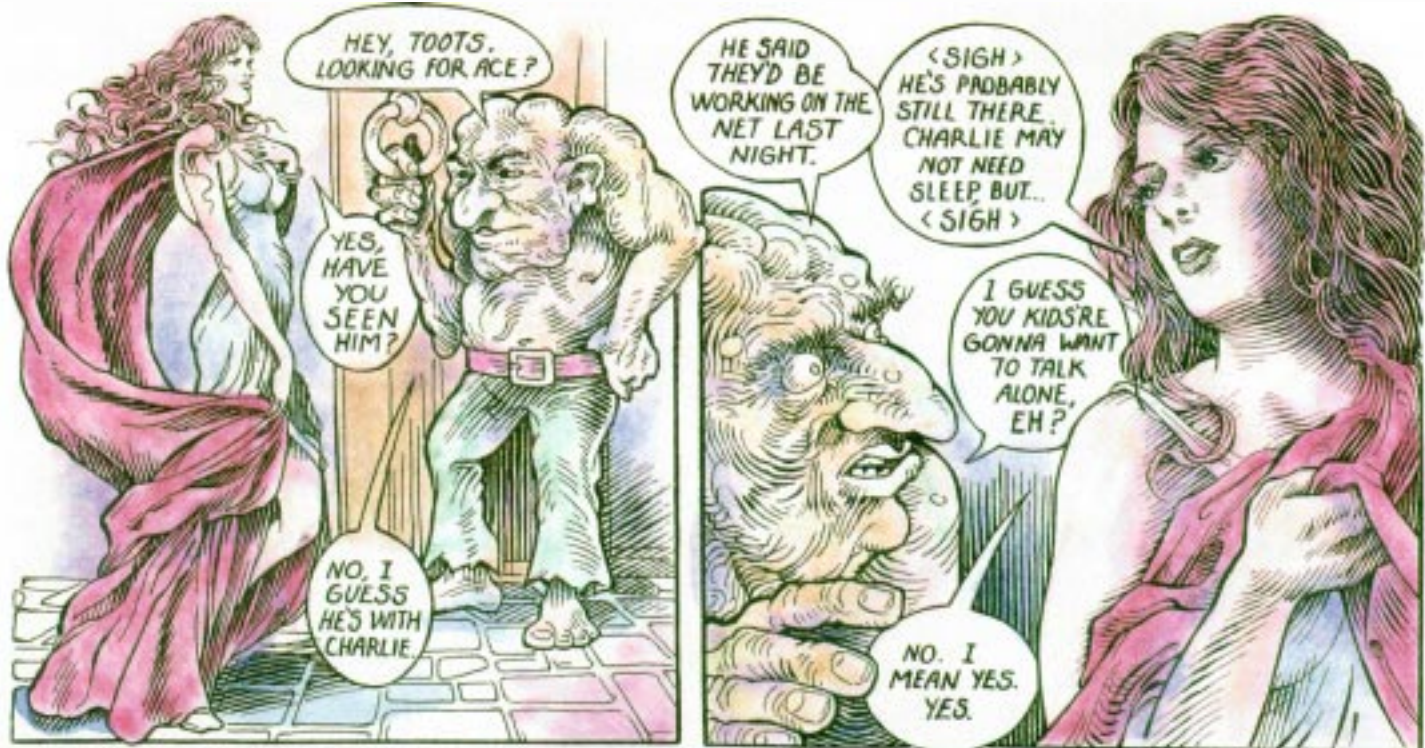


HE'S PROBABLY READING ABOUT THAT BOOK RIGHT NOW, WHILE I SIT HERE WRITING ABOUT HIM.



SOONER OR LATER, WE NEED TO STOP WRITING AND START TALKING ABOUT US.



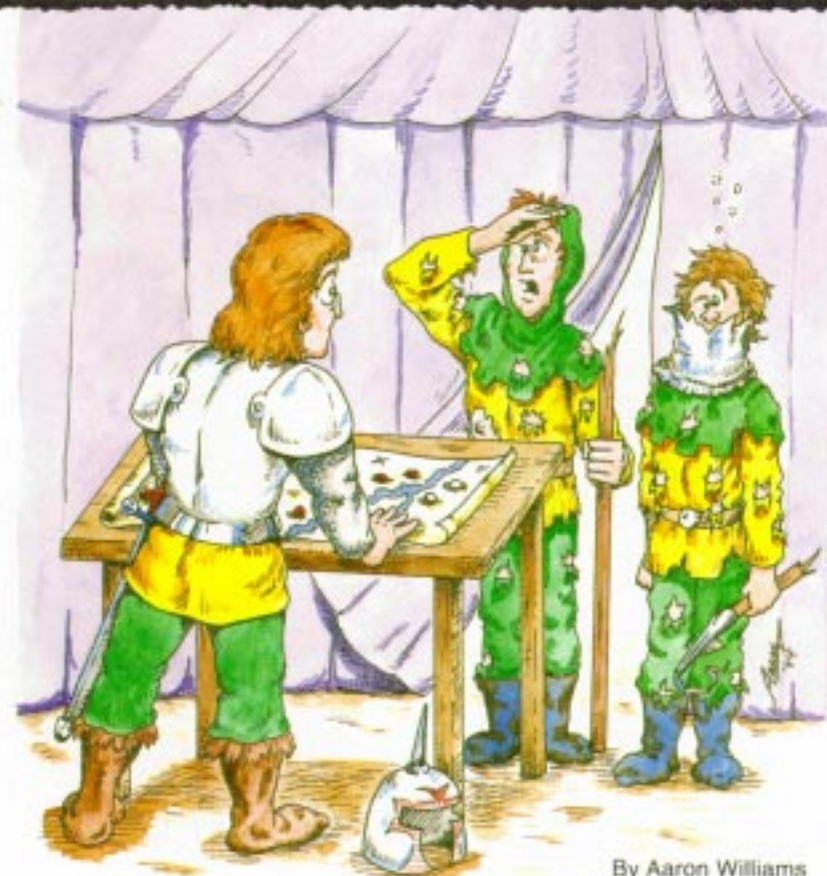


"Not the
Snow White
...!?"

Dragonmirrh



E.B. Wagner
By Edward Wagner



By Aaron Williams

"Sir! The giants have invented cleats!"

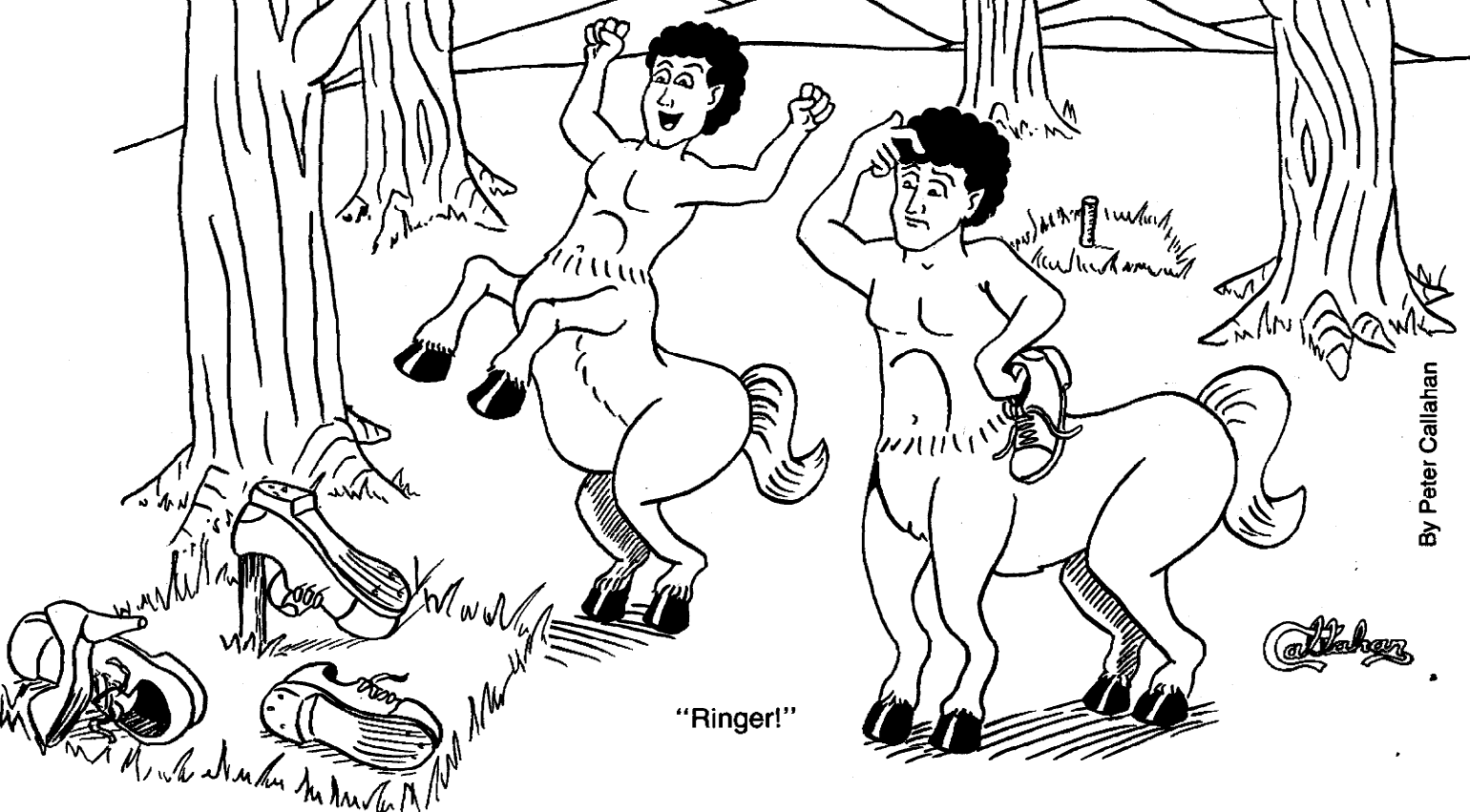


By Mark McCabe

"Madge! We've got
halfings!"



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"Ringer!"

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HEY BALDY, MOVE.

MOVE OR BE ART.

WE HAVE MUCH YET TO LEARN OF THEIR WAYS. YAMARA WAS ASSAULTED AND BADLY STUNG AFTER ORDERING BEER AT THEIR MILK BAR.

PASSING ON BAD HABITS TO OUR PUPAE!

THEY'RE FIGHTIN' WORDS!

—AND YOU CALL YOURSELF "HUMAN!"

NO!

NO, I DO NOT!

DAY 7. NEL HAS BEEN STANDING ON THE EDGE OF TOWN FOR DAYS. OUR HOSTS CLAIM SHE KEEPS THEM FROM BEING MISTAKEN FOR FOOD. I'M NOT SURE WHAT THIS MEANS, BUT I'VE BEEN HEARING A LOT ABOUT NEL.

OR SHOULD I JUST USE A BLANKET FOR ONE BIG REVEAL?

JOE, DO YOU THINK NEL WOULD FIND ME MORE DELIGHTFUL IF I WRAPPED MYSELF IN MANY VEILS—

I FIND I AM MISSING PERSEPHONE VERY MUCH.

DAY 8. I DREAMT THAT PERSEY WAS ON A TIGHTROPE OVER AN ABYSS CIRCLED BY LOTS OF LITTLE WINGED BEARS SINGING ABOUT NUTS, MONEY, & OATS.

CRUNCH! INSTANT CRUELTY!

JOE... I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET HER RUN AWAY.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?

I TRIED CONFIDING MY FEARS FOR PERSEY'S SAFETY TO OGREK, BUT HE WAS TOO BUSY INTRODUCING BILLIARDS TO HARD FUN.

DASH IT ALL, JOE, THAT'S JUST HOW WOMEN ARE!

THE MOVEMENT OF THESE SPHERES SEEMS TO REFLECT A CERTAIN PHILOSOPHY... COOL.

LEAVE THEM TO THEIR OWN DEVICES, AND THEY'LL SORT THEMSELVES OUT JUST FINE.

THAT'S THE FOURTH SPECIES TO MISTAKE MY LEG HAIR FOR AN OASIS!!

LOOK, I'M SORRY ABOUT THE HAIRY CANTRIP, BUT DROW PERFECTED DEPILATION CENTURIES AGO—

WHY CAN'T I CUT IT EVEN WITH A MAGIC DAGGER? OH, I DON'T KNOW, IT'S SOMETHING I LEARNED ON THE FLY AS A KID.

I THINK IT'S '3 HARK '45 VS. SUNLIGHT?

OH, AND IT'S GOT AN EGO RATING—

WHAT??

PARTY TENSIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH. NO ONE HAS SEEN PERSEY ANYWHERE. NOTHING DECENT IS ON CRYSTALNOX.

DAY 9. TERRIBLE EARTHQUAKES LAST NIGHT ARE EXPLAINED THIS MORNING.

MOUNTAINS GONE. BIG KUZ HAD LUNCH.

HE'S ON OUR SIDE, ISN'T HE? SAY HE'S ON OUR SIDE, NEL.

THIS SEEM LETTERHYDE SOME ACTION WILL YOU PUT THAT PEN DOWN AND DO SOMETHING USEFUL? WE'VE BEEN MUSTERING TO ATTACK GLATHHELD ALL WEEK!!

TO HAVE GANNIZED THE PERHAPS WE'LL SEE

KUZ LEAVE HILL FOR NEL. HIM ALL RIGHT.

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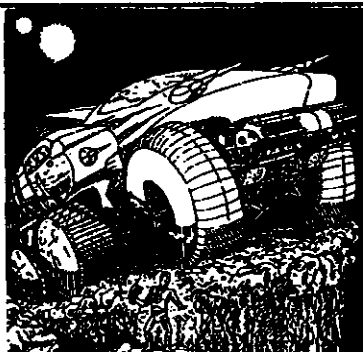
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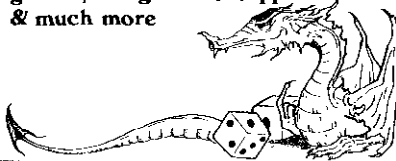
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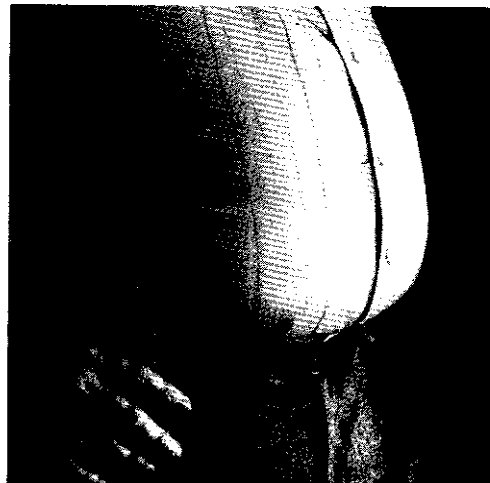
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It's okay to fight at the table . . . really!

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Storm Angle (Global Games)

Despite all those times that your parents told you not to fight at the table, for every rule there is an exception—table-top miniatures games in this case. In this column, I'll take a special look at terrain for table-top games, from hills and rivers to structures and barricades.

While most miniatures games point out that you don't need miniatures terrain to play, giving examples of representing hills with books, woods with cotton balls, etc., many gamers eventually tire of a game table that looks more like a magazine rack or bathroom counter. Sooner or later they start looking for some terrain to add that extra touch of realism to their gaming environment.

Miniatures games span a number of scales, from the 1/1200+ scales of space battle games to the 28-mm scales of some fantasy games. Consequently, in order to

fill the needs of gamers, miniatures terrain comes in all shapes and sizes.

In addition to differing scales, your choice of terrain will be affected by the various genres you play. Futuristic games, such as the WARHAMMER 40K*, *Star Wars** Miniatures Battles, and FLASHPOINT* games, can make use of all manner of strange, alien terrain. Historical games, such as the WRG*, FIRE & FURY*, and DBM* games, are likely to use more traditional, realistic terrain. Fantasy game systems, such as the

BATTLESYSTEM® and WARHAMMER FANTASY BATTLES* rules, can make use of both traditional and fantastic terrain.

The choice is yours, based on your interests and those with whom you play. The surface of the table is yours to create. If you use fantastic terrain, you may even enjoy creating special rules for it, making it more than just a piece of terrain—it becomes an active element of the game.

I favor a traditional table top with one or two pieces of fantastic terrain, such as a small crystal forest, or some strange plant-life. Not strange enough to interfere with play, but enough to liven up the table's appeal. I have, however, seen some pretty cluttered tables that worked out okay. The first time I saw the local convention's WARHAMMER 40K tournament terrain set-up I was stupefied. (I suppose I should be used to that feeling by now.) nearly every square inch had some sort of terrain on it. Much to my amazement, the players enjoyed themselves, terrain and all.

The following is a very small cross section of what's available in the way of table-top terrain. The actual range of miniatures terrain is nearly limitless, and the price ranges are almost as vast, from very reasonable to exorbitant.

So much for indulging my own curiosity and fascination these last couple of columns. As an avid role-player and rabid miniatures gamer, I have always had an attraction for accessories and terrain in miniature scales. I just wanted to share a little of that with you. Next time we scour the market for some of the best miniatures products in the science-fiction genre.

As always, I welcome your comments and suggestions. You can write me at: From the Forge, PO. Box 9, Murrieta CA 92564. Until next time . . .

Explanation of Ratings

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Slag, a good doorstop | 6 Good, definitely worth your perusal |
| 2 Poor, for die-hards only | 7 Great, have you seen this yet? |
| 3 Well below average, needs work | 8 Excellent, you have to see this! |
| 4 Below average, but salvageable | 9 Incredible, where can I get one? |
| 5 Standard, average quality | 10 No mortal hands produced this! |

Reviews

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#3020 Storm Angel

LEGIONS OF STEEL* line

Sculptor: Dave Summers

Scale: 28 mm

Cost: \$8.95

Technical: 4 Artistic: 9 Value: 7

Editor's Note: The following review was slated to appear in Ken's last column—DRAGON® issue #212. Due to space considerations, the review was cut. However, Ken's reference to the below figure under the "Best of Show" headline was not deleted. Ken selected the Storm Angel as one of his "Gamer's Best of Show" winners. We apologize to all involved for the confusion that resulted from the oversight.

—Dale "D'oh" Donovan

One of the most formidable figures in the Black Empire's forces, the Storm Angel is a must for any LEGIONS OF STEEL player. This figure is an incredible example of detail work.

Unfortunately, the casting doesn't do the figure justice. There are visible parting lines and a few areas of flash where the mold has broken down. A little work is required to reclaim this figure, but it's worth it.

The model comes in four pieces: the base piece, the shield, the heavy lance (energy weapon), and the three-flared shoulder piece. All of the pieces attach easily, requiring little or no putty.

I was truly amazed at the detail of this piece. The Black Empire is typified by ornate armor and gear, but this goes beyond even that. Only a few sculptors are capable of work like this, and Dave Summers is one of them. Fine lines and etchings cover nearly every surface of this figure.

The Storm Angel is a specially trained leader equipped with Steel Raptor armor, which is ridden into battle. If you look closely, you will see that the rider's legs lay along side the tail of the mobile suit. While recognizing that the filing will take a little time, I couldn't recommend this figure more highly.

Reaper Miniatures

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#TD 005 through 007 Armored Samurai

DAIMYO* line

Sculptor: Staff

Scale: 25 mm

Cost: \$.90 each

Technical: 6 Artistic: 7 Value: 8



Armored Samurai (Reaper Miniatures)



Fireplace, Cave Entrance, & Control Panels (Stone Mountain)

Reaper's DAIMYO line is a great series of oriental figures. These three figures, while sold separately, show a diversity of poses for their armored samurai.

There are a few minor mold lines on each figure, but clean up is simple and no detail is threatened. A small amount of flash can be found in tight areas, like the small opening in the curve of a right samurai's arm or between the legs.

The detail is very good, which is an accomplishment considering the composite nature of samurai armor. Each samurai is wearing a mask and is poised for action. The two swordsmen have some motion in their stances while the Bowman draws a steady bead on his target.

The masks are sharply detailed and rough looking, as was the nature of such masks. The clothing and armor is well positioned and detailed appropriately. Painting will be a challenge—you might want to check out a book on samurai dress and armor, to be sure you get the color schemes.

At \$.90 per figure, these figures are a great value.

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#FAN140 Troll Head & Stone

Fireplace

#FAN115 Cyclopean Cave Entrance

#FAN516 Control Panels

FANTASTIC WORLDS* line

Sculptor: David Babb

Scale: 25 mm Cost: \$5.95, \$5.95, & \$6.95

Technical: 7 Artistic: 7 Value: 6

Well-designed accessories, perfect for gaming and modeling uses, these sets are a small sampling of the huge FANTASTIC WORLDS line of figures and accessories.

These are seamless resin castings—there are, however, a few small bubbles. Small bubbles don't cause too many problems, and they can be corrected by filling with epoxy.

The two fireplaces, great for any fantasy setting, will lend warmth to your gaming. (Sorry.) A good paint job will really show off the detail. The cyclopean cave en-



Alien Rock Outcropping (Stone Mountain)



Large Dome &* Weapon Array (Stone Mountain)

trance, also useful for fantasy settings, is a single, relatively flat piece that may need support when in use. The detail of these sets, including both sculpting and texture, is very good and crisp enough that it will help with painting during washing and drybrushing. The price is about average for resin castings of this size and quality.

I am particularly fond of the control panels—the style is perfect for Space Opera scenes. The price on this set is great, considering you get three different control stations. Again, the detail is good. Accessories like this can really spice up play, or add necessary detail to that vignette you're working on.

#FAN532 Alien Rock Outcropping

#FAN 100 Log Barricades

FANTASTIC WORLDS line

Sculptor: David Babb

Scale: 15-25 mm Cost: \$6.95 & \$5.95

Technical: 8 Artistic: 7 Value: 6

The alien rock pack contains three crystalline rock outcroppings of varying sizes while the log barricades includes two corner sections and two straight sections. All make great additions to a table-top scene.

There are no visible lines, rough spots, and no pitting. The bottoms will need a little sanding and a hobby knife will prove useful for trimming a small amount of excess material from the barricades.

The alien rocks are great! There are three sizes of rock, with a common shape. Some sort of mold, fungus, or grass grows along the bottom of the smaller bases and along the top of the larger. Painting the crystal will be a challenge, if you try to stay true to natural crystal coloring. An amber or smokey topaz coloring would be interesting.

The log barricades are well done, supported with dirt and heavy rails driven into the ground. Cut log ends show the heart of the tree, and the bark is heavy with a rough texture. Assembled into one structure, it's about 8" long, plenty of room for that small unit of archers.

#FAN536 Large Dome/Bunker

#FAN537 Weapons Array for Dome (3 types)

FANTASTIC WORLDS line

Sculptor: David Babb

Scale: 15-25 mm Cost: \$11.95 each

Technical: 8 Artistic: 8 Value: 6

For use with futuristic games, the resin dome and weapon array sets will add a level of detail to your table that you've been missing out on until now!

There are few areas of excess material, (making this a very clean set. The only notable clean-up are the bottoms of the bases, which need to be sanded level—a quick and simple job. Please pay attention to the instructions on washing the resin pieces before priming, or a great paint job may be lost when the paint peels away.

The dome is highly detailed and comes with a separate, metal door. The weapon set comes with three interchangeable turrets for use with the dome, each with its own weapons; a huge mortar-like cannon, an energy cannon of some sort, and a missile battery. These pieces have a rough concrete texture and the detail is great.

The dome is a bit pricey, but the weapons array set is very reasonable, averaging out to the rating above. These are great terrain pieces that will add that hi-tech touch you're looking for.

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#F0015 Orc Outpost

GRENDL* imported

Sculptor: Peter Flannery

Scale: 25 mm

cost: \$19.95

Technical: 5 Artistic: 7 Value: 5

The Orc Outpost comes with a three-orc tent, a stone hut, and a banner. A great addition for any fantasy table-top scene, this set will finally give the orcs something to defend!

Otherwise very clean, this set did have a few problems where the mold filled in too thin, like with weapon blades and the support beams for the hut's roof. The hut didn't quite fill all the way, leaving the bottom slightly uneven, but sandpaper will cure that.

The tent and roof of the hut are wonderfully detailed as sagging cloth and the stonework of the hut is great. The hut's doorway is an animal hide blanket while the outside is adorned with shields and skins. Leaning against the tent are a couple of spears and a shield. Even a simple thing like the banner is a marvelous piece of work. The only thing that I didn't like were the strange looking skulls, but that's a matter of taste.

Geo-Hex

2126 North Lewis

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Voice: (503) 288-4805 Fax: (503) 288-8992

Mail Order: Yes Catalog:

#GSCB-01 Streets and Highways

#GSCB-02 Downtown Blocks

Gamescape City-Blox* line

Scale: 6 mm to 15 mm Cost: \$11.95 & 19.95

Technical: 7 Artistic: 7 Value: 5

City-Blox are designed for use with Geo-Hex's Gamescape products. Streets and Highways gives you 13' of roads plus a number of intersections. Downtown Blocks gives you 18 city blocks on which to move your miniatures, from mechs to vehicles to character models.

Screen printed in gray and black on white fabric, the effect is quite nice. The Streets and Highways set is a good value and serves a much needed role in modern and futuristic miniatures gaming. While it was possible to get decent looking dirt roads, there just weren't any good paved roads until now.

The blocks are graphed in quarter-inch squares and the roads have white line medians. The quad-rule fades in some of the blocks, and the sidewalk breaks up in a couple of places, but the overall quality is very good.

The downtown blocks mat is 36" X 22" and broken up into 18 blocks—6 large and 12 small. It can be cut into smaller, modular chunks for rearrangement. A very useful tool for miniatures gaming or even role-playing in 15 mm scale, it may be a little expensive for some folks.

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#HP31 1" Small Regular Hills (5)

#HP42 1" Medium Rough Edge Hills (3)

Scale: Any Cost: \$6.00, \$10.00

Technical: 9 Artistic: 7 Value: 8

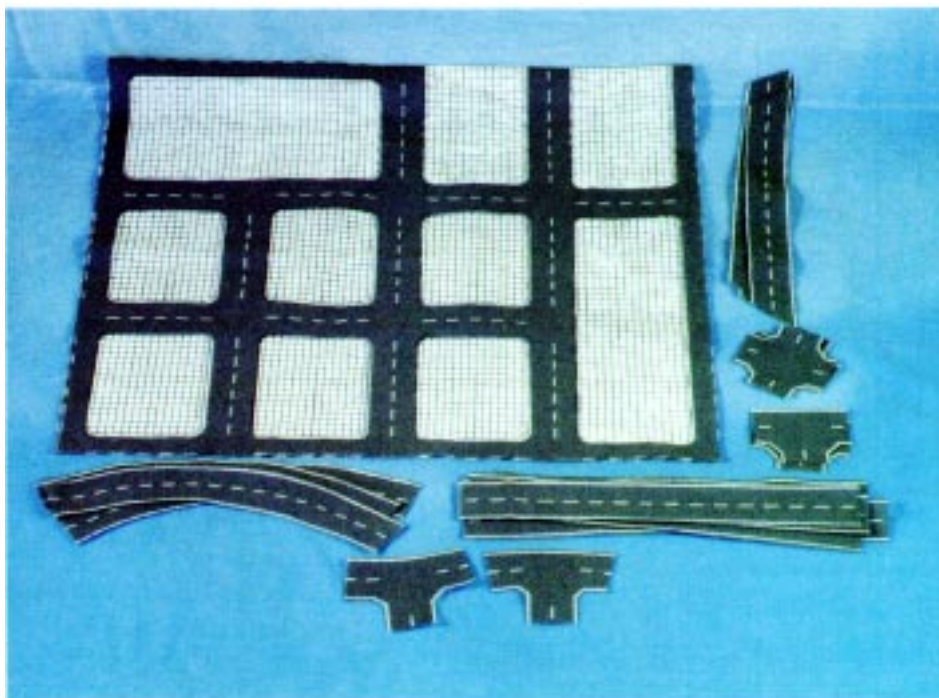
These are good looking and pretty durable hills for your table-top gaming. Also available are 24" terrain squares used as a terrain base. They include plain grass, rivers, ponds, or roads.

The hills are made of expanded, heavy polystyrene, coated with some sort of a felt-like surface. The surface doesn't come off with rubbing or light scraping, so it ought to hold up for quite a while with normal use. The hills hold up to a decent amount of abuse, but don't be too brutal—it is, after all, polystyrene.

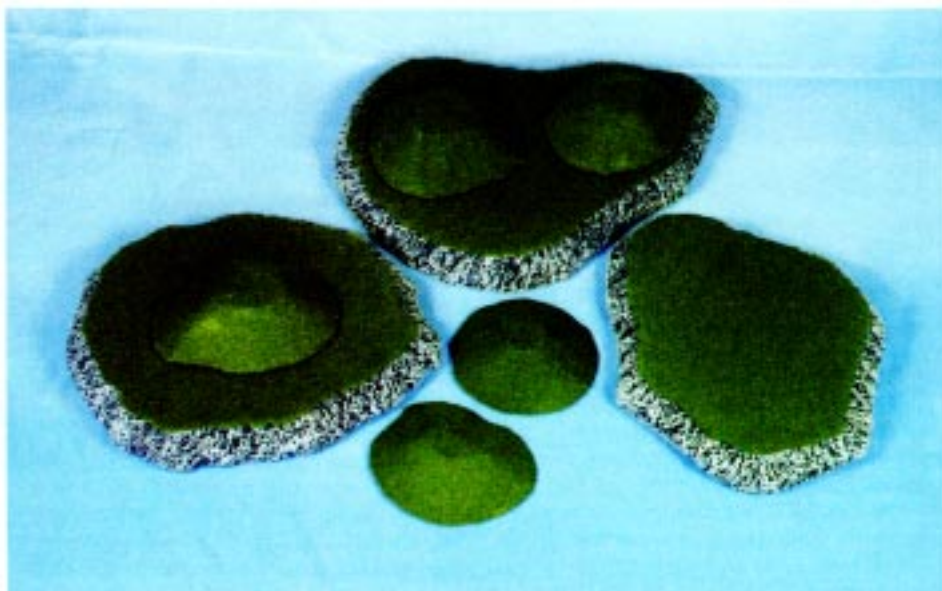
There are two styles of hills: regular (sloped), and rough edged (self explanatory). You can see the difference in the picture. Both are a great deal. Having made quite a bit of my own terrain, requiring a major investment of time, I appreciate a reasonably priced, off-the-shelf alternative.



Orc Outpost (Grendel)



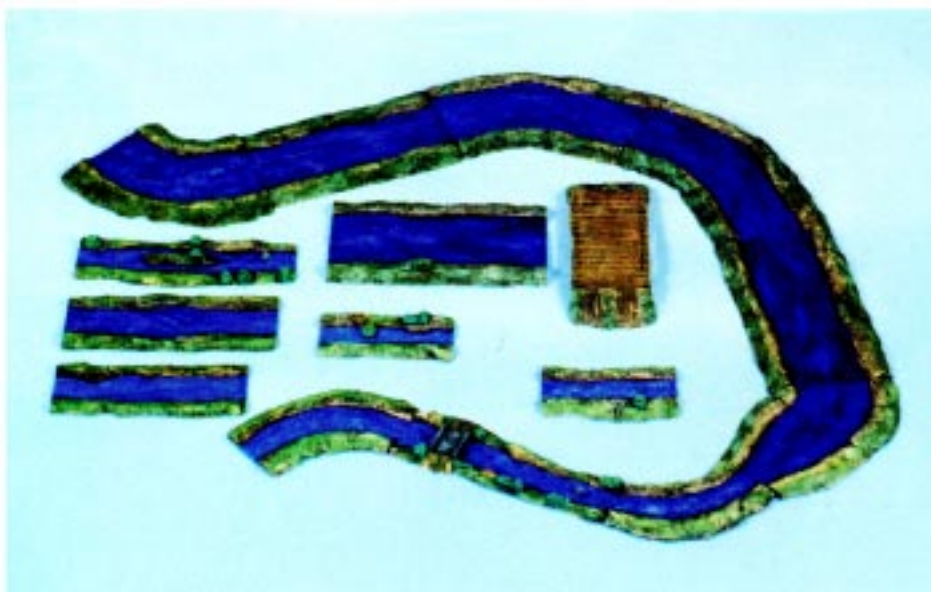
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#ER-32 Thatch and Stucco

Cottage (II)

Euro Buildings line

Sculptor: Leo Walsh

Scale: 20-25 mm cost: \$7.00

Technical: 6 Artistic: 7 Value: 8

Cast in resin as a solid piece, this cottage isn't going to move any time the table is bumped, and it will make a great addition to your collection of gaming accessories.

The casting is very good but there is some pitting, a regular occurrence in resin products. There isn't a lot of pitting, however, and most of it will disappear as you paint. There are a couple of areas that I would fill with putty and allow to dry before painting, those being detailed areas

such as window sills or doors. You also will want to use a knife to trim away the traces of excess resin at the base of the cottage.

The detailing of the walls, windows, doors, and chimney is very good. The thatch roof is well above the average for similar products I've seen. The overall impression of this cottage is great, and it gives just the right feel for table-top miniatures games and could even find use as a prop in role-playing games.

Anyone who's looked at the prices of scale buildings lately will know that this is a great price. I've seen 1/300 scale, with the same level of detail, priced at \$12-\$15, so I'm excited to see some reasonable, even inexpensive, prices.

TCS also sells finished (painted) products, but only through mail order and at a reasonably higher price. The catalog details which products are available finished and the cost.

#604 Wide River System

#604 Basic Set River System

#725 Short Log Bridge

Game Table Accessories line

Sculptor: Leo Walsh (& Mark Allspach on the basic river)

Scale: 10 mm-25 mm Cost: \$8.00, \$8.00, \$5.00

Technical: 6 Artistic: 7 Value: 8

Each river system comes as an eight-piece, resin set that assembles to give you 32 + " of great river terrain! The log bridge is meant for the wide river system, but TCS has smaller bridges for the basic river system.

The pieces have occasional pitting problems, but they are minor and should disappear during painting. The connecting edges match pretty well, though a couple need trimming in order for the edges to be flush. After sanding the bottoms, very little trimming of excess material is needed.

Along the edges of both river sizes is a slight mound that can be painted as either dirt or grass. The sets contain a mixture of straight sections, gentle turns, tighter turns, and the wide system even contains two specialty pieces. The specialty pieces consist of a very tight turn, and an adapter piece which allows you to connect the wide river set to the basic river system.

The bridge has a great wood grain and a dirt road that leads up to it on either side. It fits very well between most of the wide river pieces. If you've priced resin terrain pieces lately, you know that these are great prices for sets of this size and quality.

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#HOT21 Defenses

#HOT22 Fortifications

Sculptor: Staff

Scale: 15 mm-25 mm cost: £2.50

Technical: 7 Artistic: 7 Value: 6

Great for 15-mm or 25-mm scales, these defenses will give your army some well detailed positions to hold against overwhelming odds. Then again, who wants to hold anything against overwhelming odds—run, you fools!

Each set has a few minor mold lines that clean away easily with hobby knife or file. Other than that, these are clean models.

The defenses include two wooden archery walls and two wooden barricades. The walls are simple, though they have a nice



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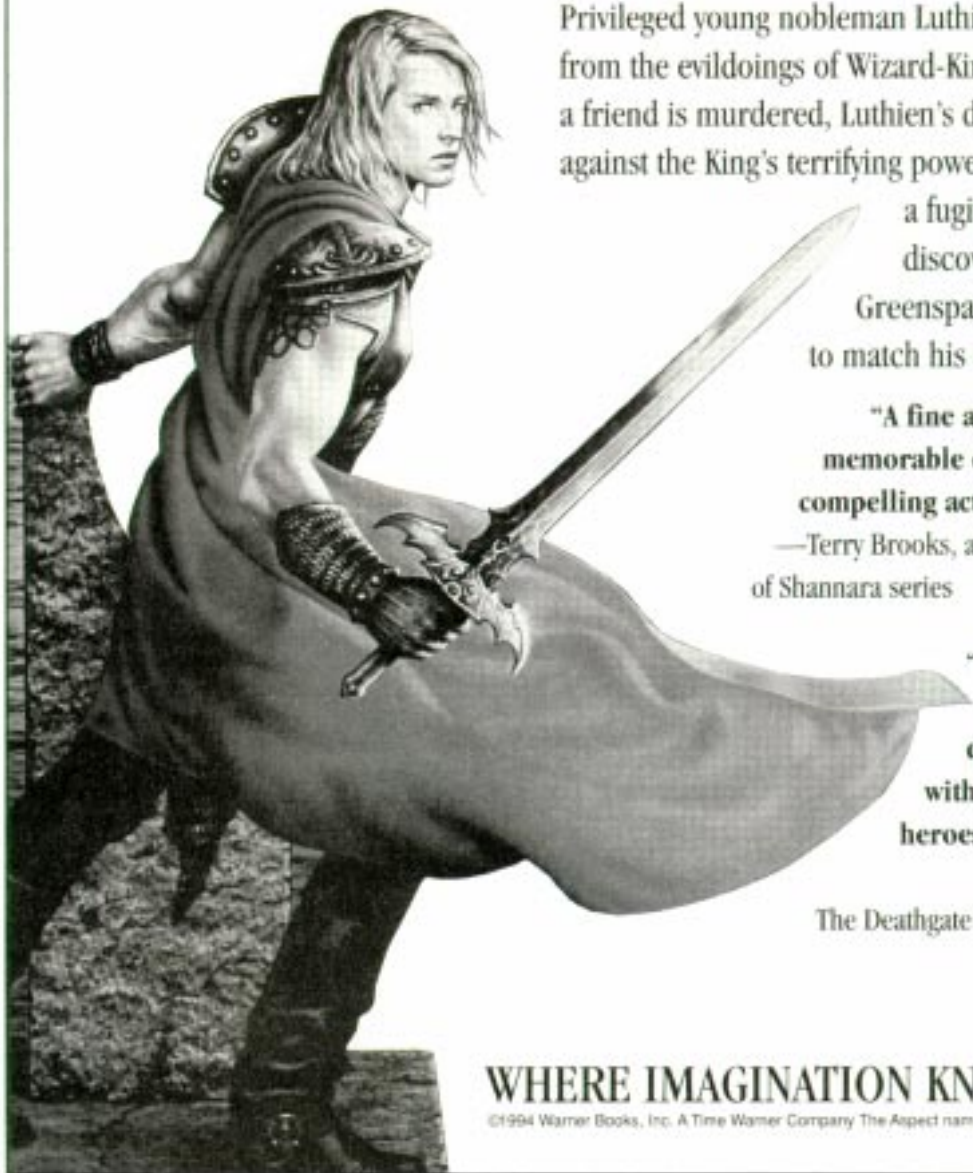
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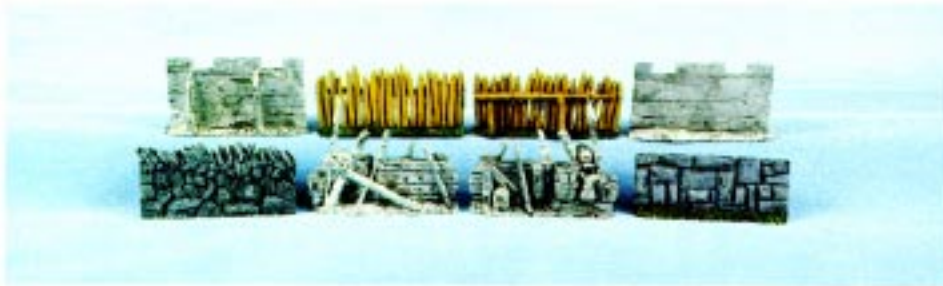
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Defenses and Fortifications (Alternative Armies)



Scavengers (Grenadier)

wood grain. The barricades are great! They are made of a wooden door, a few heavy staves, some barrels, boxes, and even some sacks. A couple of spears lean against the barricades in readiness.

The fortifications include two short wooden fences and two stone walls. The wooden fences are sharpened at the tips to discourage climbing while one of the stone walls is topped with split rocks for the same purpose.

All of the pieces are well sculpted, though the barricades and shale topped rock wall are by far the most impressively detailed. The price in the US, assuming you can find it, would be about \$5 or \$6. Any miniatures game would profit by the appearance of these pieces.

Grenadier Models, Inc.

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#1501 Scavengers

FUTURE WARRIORS* series
Sculptor: Mark Copplestone
Scale: 25 mm cost: \$4.00
Technical: 7 Artistic: 8 Value: 8

Another blister from Grenadier's FUTURE WARRIORS line (one of my absolute favorites), these scavengers from a *Mad Max*-like world appear to have had a rough life.

There are minimal parting lines and little flash. The only rough area is under the right arm of the guy with the raised pistol. The other figure is picture perfect. Clean up should be fast and easy. The figures come with round, plastic bases.

As we have come to expect from this line, the attention to detail takes these figures far beyond the norm. For example, take the nasty guy with the raised pistol. Aside from the canteen, carrying case, and ammo pouches at his belt, he carries a rifle tucked into the bedroll on his back and there is a small, iron cross medal on his left breast. The rends and tears in his clothes tell his life's story.

The second figure, with his gas mask-covered face and all manner of gear strapped on his back, is also very cleverly done. I can't wait to see what's next in this line. Getting two figures like this for \$4.00 is a great deal in my estimation.

Best of Show

This issue's choice for Gamer's BoS is Grenadier's Scavengers. Ya, I know it was one of the few gaming blisters in this column, but it would have taken incredible competition to keep it out of the winners' circle anyway. The Scavengers are a striking pair of futuristic survivors that will do what it takes to make it through, one day at a time.

For modeler's BoS (or should we call it terrain's BoS for this issue?), we have Stone Mountain Miniatures' Weapons Array for Dome and TCS's Wide River System. The weapons arrays are so well designed and detailed that they just have to be on any SF miniatures table. The wide river is a great value for 15-mm to 25-mm games and will doubtlessly grace many of my future table-top games.

Terrain Specialties' hills come in as a close runner-up, and a great value as well.

Letters

Continued from page 4

Second, my military base abruptly closed, and I was swept off to another before I ever received my first subscription copy. As any ex-serviceman knows, the military postal service is seldom cited for its speed or attention to change-of-address forms. That's how September and October flew by and I was still without my magazines.

My wonderful wife, witnessing my woe and sensing my sorrow, took it upon herself to write to TSR and explain the situation.

Two weeks later I simultaneously received issues #209 and 210, which had been delayed at my old APO box, *and* I received issues #209 and 210 from the diligent men and women at TSR who just wanted to make sure I got what I paid for.

All I can say is thanks so much for thinking of me, the customer. In a world where some companies would have asked for a change of address and left me out to dry, it is good to know that there are still people out there who care. Thanks for being there. Thanks for producing such great products. Thanks for opening my mind to new and wonderful worlds. Thanks for introducing me to the greatest artist in our time, Larry Elmore. Thanks for helping to pioneer and engineer the finest and most powerful teaching tool on earth, role-playing.

I am returning the extra copies of DRAGON Magazine to you. Maybe someone who has never experienced the thrill of rushing an orc scouting party on a cold night beneath a hunter's moon will find one of these copies on a shelf in a bookstore in some quiet town. And just maybe that someone's eyes will open and their imagination will soar to new heights like mine did.

Role-players are a tight group, and an exotic breed; we have to stick up for each other. A very close friend of mine would often tell me, "If we split up the party here, who will watch your back?" I don't know why, but I feel that phrase is somehow pertinent here.

Thank you for your time, and for helping me.
Dino Sorrelle
APO AE

We usually don't publish pat-on-the-back letters, but this one obviously comes from Dino's heart (in other words, he didn't write it in the hope that it would be printed). And publishing it gives us a chance to say thanks in return to Dino and the countless other people around the world who appreciate and respect what we're trying to do. Sometimes it's easy to get so immersed in a job that you lose sight of the real reason you're doing that job, and it's letters like this one that help to remind all of us at TSR why we're here. —Kim, Dale, Larry and

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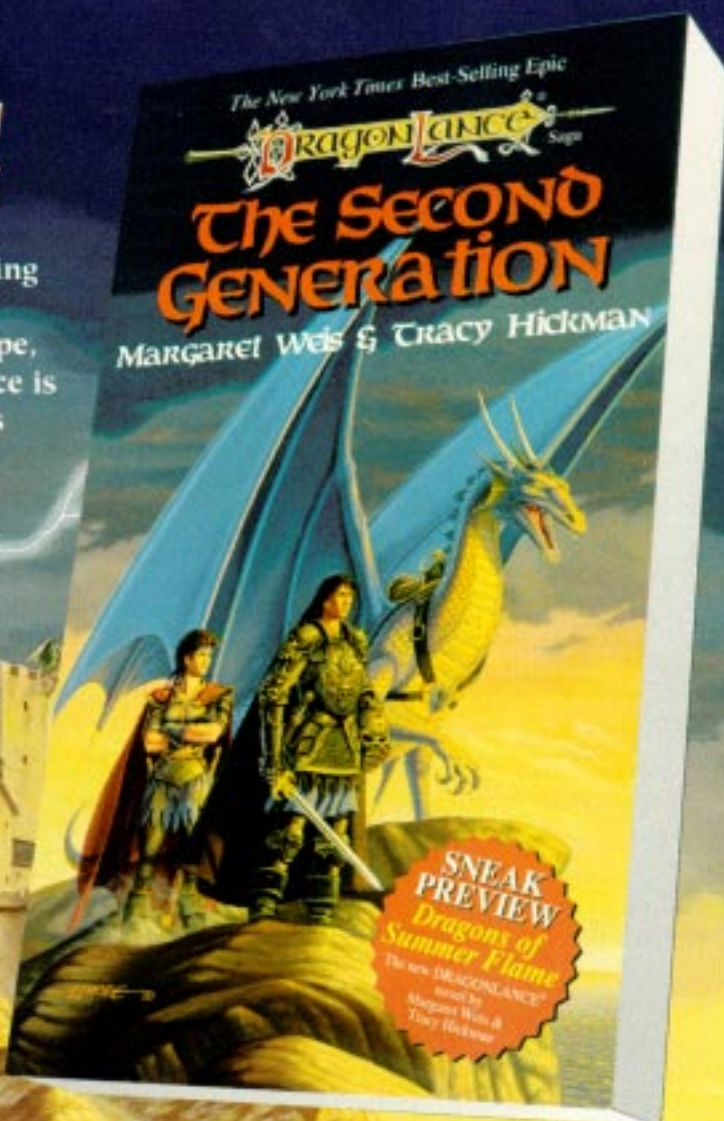


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